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# Discovering Your Roots: An Introduction to Genealogy

Course Guidebook

Professor John Philip Colletta  
Genealogist



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## John Philip Colletta, Ph.D.

Genealogist

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Professor John Philip Colletta is one of America's most popular genealogical lecturers. He holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. from The Catholic University of America. He is a faculty member of the Institute of Genealogy and Historical Research at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama; the Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy; and Boston University's Genealogical Research Program. Professor Colletta also has been an instructor and course coordinator for the National Institute on Genealogical Research, the Genealogical Institute of Texas, and the Genealogical Institute of Mid-America.

For 20 years, while laying the foundation for his career in genealogy, Professor Colletta worked half-time at the Library of Congress and taught workshops at the National Archives. Today, he lectures nationally, teaches at local schools, and conducts programs for the Smithsonian Institution's Resident Associate Program. His many clients have included The Johns Hopkins University; the National Park Service; the Chicago Public Library; the National Society, Sons of the American Revolution; the Jewish Genealogical Society of New York; and numerous state and county genealogical societies.

Professor Colletta's publications include both scholarly and popular articles; two manuals, *They Came in Ships: A Guide to Finding Your Immigrant Ancestor's Arrival Record* and *Finding Italian Roots: The Complete Guide for Americans*; and one murder mystery/family history, *Only a Few Bones: A True Account of the Rolling Fork Tragedy and Its Aftermath*.

Professor Colletta appears frequently on podcasts and local and national radio and television programs. He is featured in an episode of *Ancestors*, the 10-part KBYU-TV series, as well as its sequel. He has received many professional honors, including fellowship in the Utah Genealogical Association and

distinguished service awards from the Dallas Genealogical Society and the National Society of Daughters of Founders and Patriots of America. ■

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# Discovering Your Roots: An Introduction to Genealogy

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## Scope:

**G**enealogy is an enjoyable avocation, but it's much more than that. It's a journey of self-discovery. The more you learn about who your ancestors were, the more you learn about who you are. Few activities are as personally rewarding and exciting.

Unraveling the past—your own personal past—from scraps of evidence in old written records, maps, newspapers, and photographs is enthralling detective work ... and a considerable challenge. It requires learning skills and practicing methodology. Finding the data that link generation to generation is only half the challenge, though. The other half is learning about your ancestors as people—their education, livelihoods, what their homes were like, how they fit into their communities, their interests and character traits, happy times and sad—in short, their stories.

This course explores the sources used for researching family history; it explains methods for finding and interpreting those sources; and it demonstrates how to write a permanent account of your discoveries that current and future generations will find enjoyable and enlightening. In other words, this course teaches the skills you'll need both to locate the facts about your family and to make sense of those facts as events lived by real people in a real place and time.

The course begins with the initial step in genealogy: interviewing relatives to learn what they already know about your family's past. Subsequent lectures explore the universe of materials available on the Internet; suggest how to make the most of traditional sources lining the shelves of libraries; and show how to use federal records, such as censuses, military service records, homestead files, ship passenger lists, and naturalization records. Other lectures discuss the myriad records found in county courthouses, state archives, and historical societies, as well as the modest repositories in your ancestors' own backyards. A final chapter looks ahead to extending

your family tree overseas by using the records of your ancestors' countries of origin.

Punctuating the course are lectures that focus on ways to write an engaging narrative of your family's history, whether your goal is to share your discoveries electronically—via a website or blog—or in print—with a book or series of booklets. Lectures address how to build historical context around the facts of your ancestors' lives; craft biography; and employ such elements as multigenerational charts, a numbering system, and illustrations. One lecture is devoted to the crucial matter of interpreting sources: how to follow the Genealogical Proof Standard to evaluate evidence and arrive at historical truth.

Your investigations will result in discoveries great and small, surprising and mundane, amusing and troubling, but all equally a part of your heritage. Genealogy is a never-ending pursuit, though: Every discovery brings a new mystery to be solved. Millions of Americans are finding it to be a worthwhile endeavor. And the unanticipated gift of genealogy is this: It gives you your own personal historical perspective on world history ... and on life, allowing you to see yourself in a whole new way. ■



# Interviewing Kin and Mining Home Sources

## Lecture 1

**G**enealogy is an enjoyable—and rather addictive—avocation. It's enthralling detective work and a journey of self-discovery. Researching family history requires learning skills and practicing historical methodology. It also requires learning about your ancestors as people—their education, livelihoods, migrations, homes, communities, and more. Our goal in this course will be to develop the skills you need both to locate the historical facts about your family and to make sense of those facts as events experienced by real people. We begin with the first step in getting to know your ancestors: interviewing relatives. The knowledge you gain here will equip you with a sketch of your family tree and serve as the basis for all your future research.

### Interview Preparation

- Genealogical inquiry is a progression from the known to the unknown. You always start with a few known facts that allow you to access sources that will yield new facts. Those new facts, in turn, allow you to access other sources for more facts, and so on. In this way, the memories of your relatives provide the foundation of your investigation. But effective interviews are more than pleasant conversations; they require preparation and organization.
- The first step in preparing for an interview is to compile a list of questions. Begin by inquiring about living relatives, then move back in time to parents and their siblings, grandparents and their siblings, great-grandparents and their siblings, and so forth. Names are essential, of course, as are dates of birth, marriage, and death. Also important are the places where these key life events occurred.
  - You should also inquire about specific aspects of your ancestors' lives. Did they attend school? What were their occupations? Did they practice a religion? Did they serve in the military? How did they celebrate holidays?

- Every interview is different, of course, and as you conduct interviews, you'll be prompted to ask new questions. But a list of questions prepared in advance ensures an orderly and thorough interview. You won't wonder years later—when some of your relatives might be gone—whether you neglected to ask something.
- Once you've drafted your questions, the next step in preparation is to gather together your family keepsakes, such as old photographs, wedding invitations, certificates of citizenship, and the family Bible. Introducing these props into your interview will spark memories and evoke questions. Equally important, they enliven the exchange and make it less interrogatory and more conversational.
- Along with preparing questions and gathering props, you'll also want to do some background reading. If you already know where your grandparents lived, for example, or that they were dairy farmers or cattle ranchers, or that your great-grandfather fought



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**Sharing family mementoes creates a bond between you and the relatives you interview.**

in France during World War I, learn something about those places, occupations, or historical events.

- Finally, before you start the interview, assemble your tools: paper and a pen for note-taking and, perhaps, recording equipment to capture the interview in an audio or video format.

### **Tips for Productive Interviews**

- Because most people are unaccustomed to being interviewed, the first step in making your interviews productive is to make sure your relatives are comfortable. Meet in their homes if possible and start by getting acquainted. Show them the equipment you plan to use during the interview.
- Next, ask specific questions. “Tell me all you know about your grandparents” is too general and will bring only a sentence or two in response. You know the kind of historical information you’re looking for, but you can’t expect your relatives to know. It’s better to have specific questions prepared on your list about each ancestor.
  - Phrase your questions from the viewpoint of the relative you’re interviewing, not yourself. In other words, don’t ask about your own great-grandparent but about your relative’s aunt or uncle.
  - Avoid leading questions, which tend to prompt agreement and nonspecific answers.
- Another tip for conducting a fruitful interview is to listen. If you pay attention, your relatives will drop clues for further investigation. You may also detect contradictions or inconsistencies in the accounts of different relatives; note these for follow-up discussion. Listen, too, to catch the language of your ancestors. Older relatives who are one or two generations closer to your common forebears may still use some of their words, idioms, or aphorisms.
- Again, use props. Inherited documents, such as the passport of an immigrant ancestor, a certificate of baptism or marriage, an obituary clipped from the newspaper, an old Bible with the family record

inked in by a conscientious forebear—such items provide names, dates, and places to help you fill in your family tree.

- Artifacts that have been passed down through the family also supply information. Photographs, daguerreotypes, and *cartes de visite* (small photographic prints) reveal items, such as a grandmother's brooch or cast-iron kettle, that can stir memories and spark conversation.
- Other props you'll want to have on hand are a large sketch pad and an atlas. Drawing charts of family groups as your relative remembers them helps clarify kinships. Consulting maps to locate ancestral sites and trace migration routes is also helpful.
- It's important to maintain your skepticism; don't believe everything you hear. Passed from generation to generation, family lore has a way of taking on a life of its own. You may prove or disprove some of the stories you hear, and with some, you may never know for sure. But all the stories are part of your family's identity and, thus, should be recorded, no matter how far-fetched they may sound. Whether verifiable or not, every family story contains a kernel of truth—or there would be no story!
- Keep in mind the need to be diplomatic. If your interviewee shuts down when talking about another relative, that may be a clue that you've stumbled on a skeleton in the closet. When this happens, respect the interviewee's sense of propriety. Remember that what is a scandal to one generation is often a peccadillo to the next. Don't insist or cajole; just move on to the next question and return to the subject at the end of your interview, once you've developed some trust.
- Be patient and let your interviewee set the pace. Limbering up the memory takes time. People can remember things they heard or experienced decades earlier, but not at the drop of a hat! Few people have minds that retain discrete facts, such as the date of grandma's marriage or the birth order of grandpa's six siblings. Rather, people

remember by association. Our memories release their gems slowly, as one recollection leads to another and another.

- Exercising patience, respect, and diplomacy doesn't mean you can't use your wits; try some clever, creative ways to elicit information.
  - For example, try playing devil's advocate: "Aunt Emma, you say that Granny Miller was a genteel southern belle whom everybody loved. But Uncle Joe told me that Granny Miller was notorious for being a troublemaker." Such a statement is bound to evoke a spirited response.
  - Or you might try a "know-all" approach. You volunteer one or two facts about an ancestor as if you know everything. Then, let your interviewee disclose everything you really don't know. This technique makes the interview seem more like a stroll down memory lane than an interrogation.
- Of course, another important tip is to take notes, even if you are making an audio or video recording of the interview. Your notes will allow you to return to unexpected leads and inconsistencies you pick up on while the material is still fresh in your interviewee's mind.
- Finally, before you close your interview, ask for names of other relatives and sources who might be good prospects for future interviews. Who has family photos, documents, or heirlooms?

### **Other Important Considerations**

- The interview process isn't finished when your meeting with a relative is over.
  - First, show your gratitude for your interviewee's invaluable assistance. If you recorded the interview, you might send a copy or a transcript. You might send photographs of the two of you together or copies of old family photographs that he or she doesn't have.
  - Compare your notes from this interview to accounts you may have heard from other relatives. Note discrepancies, confused

names, contradictory dates, or dates that don't make sense. You will want to follow up on these issues in subsequent interviews. You should also contact other interviewees to keep your genealogy moving forward.

- Interviewing remotely by phone, letter, or e-mail is not as congenial or effective as meeting in person—and certainly not as much fun! Sometimes, though, you have no choice. When relatives live at a distance, interviewing remotely is less costly and time-consuming than traveling. Remember, though, that people today are not accustomed to doing much writing. No matter how well-intentioned your relatives are, if you burden them with the task of writing down their recollections, they may never “get around” to it.
- Interviewing siblings together at family reunions is convenient but has advantages and disadvantages.
  - On the one hand, the memories of one person often spark memories of others; different versions of family stories prompt discussion; and group interviews are more casual than one-on-one questioning.
  - On the other hand, people may be reticent to open up in front of the others; differing recollections may provoke quarrels; and a group interview is much harder to control than a private one.
  - However, as family historian, you shouldn't pass up any opportunity to interview relatives. If you conduct group interviews, try to get each family member aside separately for personal questioning, too.

### Organizing What You Learn

- As the quantity of information you discover grows, you will need to organize it. The traditional tools for organizing genealogical findings and keeping track of your progress are family group sheets, pedigree charts, and research logs. You can download versions of these forms from the Internet and fill them in by hand, or you can purchase a genealogy software package to manage your project.

- A family group sheet records the statistical data for each nuclear family. You enter the names of the family members and their dates and places of birth, marriage, and death. A family group sheet also provides space for you to write down the stories you have been told, as well as a place to record the sources where you obtained the information.
- A pedigree chart depicts the data in the family group sheet schematically. This is the familiar-looking family tree.
- Finally, a research log records the sources you have consulted. You note what you found or did not find, as well as other sources you may want to consult in the future.

### Suggested Reading

Akeret, *Family Tales, Family Wisdom*.

Fleming, *The Organized Family Historian*.

Greenwood, *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*.

Rose and Ingalls, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Genealogy*.

Smolenyak and Turner, *Trace Your Roots with DNA*.

Zoellner, *Homemade Biography*.

### Assignment

Contact a senior relative and schedule an interview. Compile a list of questions, gather a few family keepsakes, do some background reading, and assemble your tools for note-taking and audio or video recording. Then, enjoy the meeting! Also, download a supply of blank pedigree charts and family group sheets from the Internet or purchase a genealogy software package to record what you learn from your relatives and from future research. (Search on the terms “pedigree chart” and “family group sheet” to find free downloads online.)

# Genealogy Online—Gems and Junk

## Lecture 2

It's unthinkable to do genealogy research today without making extensive use of the Internet, but we must recognize that the Internet is replete with both genealogical gems and genealogical junk! Not all sources of information are equally reliable, and it is your responsibility as a family historian to judge the accuracy of the information you find—both online and off. In a later lecture, we'll discuss the process genealogists use to evaluate the reliability of historical sources, but for now, it's important to recognize that not everything on the Internet is accurate. In this lecture, we'll look at various Internet sites that are used in genealogy, and we'll focus on a particular source of genealogical information: U.S. census data.

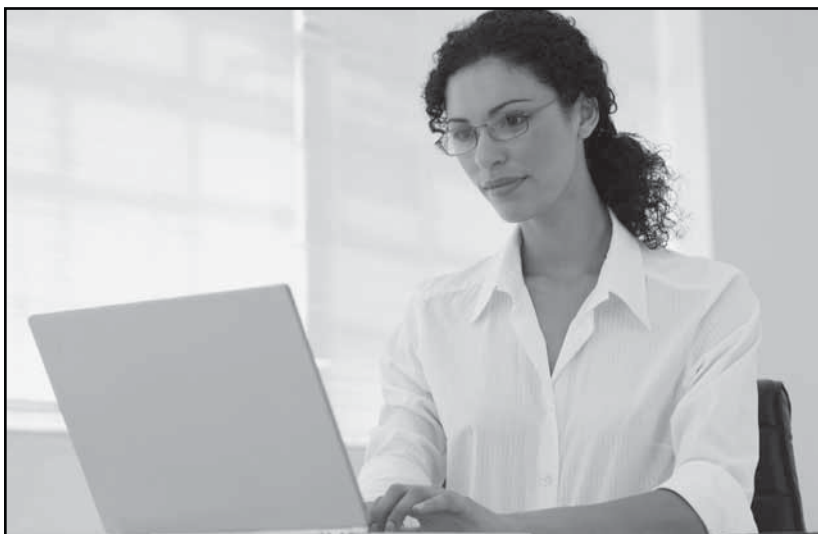
### Online Information Sources

- The most reliable Internet sites for genealogy tend to be those maintained by government agencies, such as the U.S. National Archives (Archives.gov), the Library of Congress (LOC.gov), and the state archives. They contain a colossal number of digitized historical sources, and experts vet the content of these sites. Government sites are maintained for the public good and are free to use.
- Other free sites are those of nonprofit organizations, such as the Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FamilySearch.org), as well as those of universities and historical societies. These, too, have numerous digitized historical sources, along with materials and instructions authored by individuals. The content of such sites is vetted by professionals, except for those portions devoted to uploads from users.
- Commercial genealogy sites include Ancestry.com, Fold3.com, HeritageQuestOnline.com, FindMyPast.com, and many others. These sites charge subscription fees, though many libraries offer their patrons access to such sites at no expense. The content of



commercial sites consists of genealogical materials drawn from the full spectrum of sources. But the corporations that operate these sites decide what sources are included and whether they are captured digitally, transcribed, or summarized.

- The Internet also offers many personal sites. These publish the genealogical findings of individuals of all levels of competence and credibility. Use these sites with caution, keeping in mind that it's your responsibility to double-check the accuracy of every item of information you find online.
- Depending on your family background, specialized sites may also be useful. For example, sites are available for researching Native Americans or African Americans who were slaves.
- One helpful site is CyndisList.com, which is a kind of clearing house for genealogical content on the Internet. Clicking on a subject category, such as "Immigration and Naturalization," will link you



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**Success in genealogy depends on becoming familiar with the Internet sites relevant to your hereditary groups—national, racial, religious, and so on.**

to a list of sites about that subject. You can then click on the sites that look most promising for your research.

## U.S. Population Censuses

- The U.S. government has taken a census of the American population every 10 years since 1790. Censuses through 1940 are available for public inspection—except for the 1890 enumeration, which was lost in a fire.
  - Beginning with the 1940 census, therefore, you may trace your family back to see how its composition changed every 10 years. Remember, in genealogy, you always work backward in time, from the known to the unknown; you want to be sure you're climbing your own family tree and not someone else's!
  - Probably the best place to start your census research is by visiting [www.archives.gov/research/census](http://www.archives.gov/research/census). Here, you'll find helpful information about census records, both online and in print format.
- The type and amount of information collected in the census increased over the decades. Every census is taken by an act of Congress, and the act stipulates what questions will be asked. Large pages with lines and columns—called *schedules*—were printed for each canvass. Enumerators carried these from door to door and entered the data by hand.
- Censuses of 1790 through 1840 name only the head of household. Other members of the household are indicated with slash marks made in columns representing age and sex categories. These categories are provided separately for free white persons, free black persons, and slaves.
  - Free black heads of household are named, but slaves are not; they are indicated by slash marks under the names of their owners.
  - The relationship of household members to the head of household is not specified. Thus, a slash mark in the column “Males, 15 to 20 years of age” might represent a son, son-in-

law, cousin, boarder, or some other individual. Historically, households often sheltered more than the nuclear family.

- Additional columns might record other information about the head of household, such as “Occupation” or “Foreigner Not Naturalized.” One column added in 1840 noted whether the head of household received a pension from the federal government for military service.
- Although censuses of 1790 through 1840 require careful analysis and interpretation, those of 1850 through 1940 are much less ambiguous. These censuses list every individual—white and free black—by name, followed by his or her personal information recorded in columns for age, sex, occupation, marital status, and so on. Gradually, other columns were added, such as relationship to head of household, value of personal estate, and the year of immigration and citizenship status of foreign-born residents.
- Tracing a family through U.S. censuses would appear to be a straightforward endeavor, and sometimes, it is. Often, though, the peculiarities inherent in censuses can complicate your search. Consider, for example, the census enumerators. They were given printed instructions for gathering the required information, but the instructions weren’t always followed consistently.
  - Some enumerators wrote out only surnames and used initials for given names. In crowded city tenements or on the sparsely settled frontier, census takers often missed families. In contrast, some families were recorded twice because two enumerators mistook the boundaries of their districts. Some unethical census takers padded their returns for bonus income.
  - Further, some enumerators who were familiar with the residents of their own neighborhoods simply entered the data from memory. If they found no one at home, some enumerators questioned neighbors for the required data, and some neglected to fill in every column.

## Family Names

- The fact that census takers wrote down what they heard explains why family names may have different spellings in different censuses. In addition, many family names change over time. When searching for ancestors in any record, consider the different ways your surname may have been pronounced and written. The German name Koch, for instance, might have sounded like Cook to an American census taker.
- Common family names often pose a challenge. You may find multiple individuals in any census who could be your ancestor.
  - To determine which one is yours, you may have to compare the census data with data from other sources, such as land deeds, probate records, or city directories. In some cases, you can compare the names of your ancestor's neighbors in two censuses to ensure that you've tracked down the right head of household with your common surname.
  - City directories were annual listings of employed residents, giving their names, addresses, and occupations. They can serve to corroborate information found in censuses under common surnames spelled in a variety of ways.
- Note, too, that there may be errors in online databases. The schedules that have been uploaded to the Internet are, of course, derived from old handwritten documents. To permit researchers to key in a name and find a particular individual, the archaic penmanship has been transcribed, but it's certainly possible for a transcriber to misread the census taker's handwriting.
  - To address this problem, the search functions of some websites containing census information provide "near matches" to the names you key in.
  - You can also try searching by given name, rather than surname, or you may restrict your search to a particular occupation, location, or age parameter.

- If these strategies don't work, visit the website [SteveMorse.org](http://SteveMorse.org), which provides a variety of strategies for searching online census records.
- You can also try searching traditional media, such as microfilm census records and name indexes or state or local census information printed in book form. Censuses on microfilm and the various indexes to them are available at the National Archives and in many libraries with large genealogical collections.

## Nonpopulation and Special Censuses

- U.S. population censuses are the backbone of American genealogy, but they were not the only schedules completed by census takers. Occasionally, Congress legislated additional censuses to collect data about the country's economic or social conditions. These are called *nonpopulation censuses* and *special censuses*.
- In 1918 and 1919, the U.S. Bureau of the Census returned the original schedules of the nonpopulation and special censuses to the individual states. Thus, these records ended up in many different repositories, varying from state to state. Some of them have been microfilmed, printed, or digitized, while others have not. To find out where they are today visit [www.archives.gov/research/census/nonpopulation](http://www.archives.gov/research/census/nonpopulation).
- Nonpopulation and special censuses hold information for your family history found in no other historical source, and a broad selection of these censuses is now available online. In particular, look for the following:
  - A Census of Manufactures was taken in 1810 and 1820; for manufacturing businesses, these censuses provide the owner's name, the kind of establishment, the quantity and value of goods manufactured, number of persons employed, and so on.
  - From 1850 to 1880, census takers completed three other schedules: Mortality, Agricultural, and Industrial. Mortality schedules contain the names of individuals who died during

the 12 months prior to June 1 of the census year. Agricultural schedules list farm owners and provide information about the size, kind, and value of their acreage, machinery, livestock, produce, and the like. Industrial schedules provide information about manufacturers, fisheries, mines, trading concerns, and other businesses.

- In 1880, two special enumerations were taken. One was the Census of Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Classes; the other was the Enumeration of Indians. The first of these lists people who were blind, mute, deaf, physically or mentally handicapped, or elderly and unable to care for themselves. The Enumeration of Indians lists Native Americans residing in the Dakota Territory, Washington Territory, and state of California.
- In 1885, federal funds were used to take a census of Colorado, Florida, Nebraska, the Dakota Territory, and the New Mexico Territory. The schedules completed for this canvass include population, agriculture, manufactures, and mortality.
- Finally, in 1890 a Special Census of Union Veterans and Widows of Union Veterans was taken. It provides each veteran's name, military unit, and dates of service. Unfortunately, though, the fire that destroyed the 1890 population schedules also destroyed half the records from this special census.
- All of the nonpopulation and special censuses that are extant are available in the original, on microfilm, in print, or online.

### Suggested Reading

Anderson, et al. "Duplicate Census Enumerations."

Hatten, "Finding 'Missing Men' on Early Census Records."

Helm and Helm, *Genealogy Online for Dummies*.

National Archives and Records Administration, *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*.

Schmitzer, “Far from Home.”

Szucs and Wright, “Census Records.”

## Assignment

Go online and explore the websites of the National Archives, Library of Congress, your ancestors’ state archives, Family Search, Ancestry.com, Fold 3, Find My Past, and other genealogy sites. Using key terms, see what sites you can find that pertain specifically to your ancestors’ national or ethnic groups, neighborhoods, occupations, and so forth. Then, access the U.S. decennial censuses online and, beginning with the 1940 census, use the information you’ve learned from relatives and family papers to trace your family back in time as far as you can.

# The Library—Shelves Full of Family History

## Lecture 3

Remarkable as it is, the Internet does not contain everything that has been published! Libraries hold massive amounts of information about American communities, families, and individuals. Countless books, periodicals, newspapers, maps, and images found in libraries fill in historical context, answering such questions as why your ancestors left their native countries and why they chose to settle in certain areas. In this lecture, we'll explore the wealth of material available on library shelves and look at some of the details it can provide to help flesh out your family history.

### Genealogies and Family Histories

- Genealogies and family histories are two fundamentally different ways to record the lineage of a family.
  - A *genealogy* is a record of descendants. It begins with a husband and wife, then proceeds through the generations, recording all of their descendants. A genealogy comes forward in time from the distant past to the present day.
  - A *family history*, in contrast, is a record of ancestors. It starts with an individual and records his or her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so on. A family history goes backward in time from the present day as far as your discoveries allow.
- Historians and amateur genealogists have produced thousands of genealogies and family histories. To see whether a relative of yours has published a book about your family, search the online catalogs of libraries. Also check the genealogy websites, such as Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org, where users upload family trees. The longer your ancestors have lived in North America, the more likely it is that some of them have published or appeared in a genealogy or family history.





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**Libraries provide a wealth of information for genealogical research: family histories, state and local histories, transcribed records, newspapers and periodicals, maps, historical photographs, and more.**

- When you use previously compiled pedigrees, be sure to look for documentation, and always double-check any “facts” that have no source citations.

### **State and Local Histories**

- Histories of states, counties, cities, and towns are also excellent sources of biographical information. Histories abound for all parts of the United States, and there are histories of ethnic communities, such as the Czechs of Nebraska, the Italians of St. Louis, or the Jews of Washington DC.
- Some state histories comprise two volumes: One contains the history of the state, and the other is filled with accounts of the state’s “leading families.” Note that the way to become a leading family was to subscribe to the book prior to its publication, which entitled you to submit information about your family. Genealogists

call these second volumes *mug books*; their biographical sketches are notoriously embellished.

- Even if you don't find the names of your forebears in print, state and local histories portray the physical and social circumstances in which your ancestors carried on their lives. The source citations found in these history books may also alert you to materials pertinent to your own research that you would never have known about otherwise.

### **Transcribed and Abstracted Records**

- Another valuable resource you'll find in the library is compilations of transcribed or abstracted records, including public records, such as marriage licenses, wills, land deeds, naturalization records, and ship passenger lists, as well as private records, such as parish registers, funeral home ledgers, and personal diaries and letters.
- There are many volumes of genealogical gleanings from old newspapers, including wedding announcements, anniversary celebrations, obituaries, and the like. You may also find compilations of tombstone inscriptions.
- In addition, name indexes exist for millions of records. Indexes of passenger arrival lists, naturalization records, land deeds and wills, sacramental registers of churches, and many other sources can save you a tremendous amount of time, travel, and expense in your research.

### **Serial Publications**

- Another treasure in libraries is back issues of serial publications. Genealogical and historical societies, ethnic organizations, and lineage societies (such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of Mayflower Descendants, among many others) have been publishing journals for more than a century.
- The Periodical Source Index (PERSI) is a subject index to 11,000 genealogy and local history periodicals, 3,000 of which are now

defunct. Available online through genealogy sites, PERSI covers articles published from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, and it's updated regularly. PERSI can be searched by location, by surname as subject, or by how-to—for articles on methodology.

- Millions of our ancestors have been mentioned in periodical literature; thus, it's essential to search PERSI. If you find an article that looks promising, note the title of the periodical, issue number, and pertinent pages, then access the periodical at a library or borrow it through interlibrary loan. You may also purchase a photocopy of the article from the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, which has the largest public genealogy collection in the United States.

## Newspapers

- Another library resource that's fascinating, full of information about our ancestors, great fun to use, and more readily accessible than ever thanks to the Internet is the newspaper.
- Perhaps no single source portrays the day-to-day life of your ancestors' world as vividly and thoroughly as the local newspaper. Birth notices, marriage announcements, and obituaries provide names, dates, and places that extend your family tree and often reveal personal details, such as the military service of veterans and the birth country of immigrants.
- If your ancestors owned a business, newspaper advertisements may enrich your family story. Notices from the Rotary Club may mention your ancestors, too. Functions of religious institutions were reported in-depth, as were activities of social organizations, such as the Masons. Newspapers also covered local politics.
- Newspapers are proliferating on the Internet at tremendous speed. Ancestry.com, ProQuest.com, PaperofRecord.com, and GenealogyBank.com are just a few of the many sites that now feature historical newspapers. Even if the newspaper of your ancestor's community is not available online, it has likely

been microfilmed, and you may borrow that microfilm through interlibrary loan. Many indexes to genealogical extracts from old newspapers have also been published in book form.

- To find newspapers that might feature your ancestors, first check the Library of Congress website *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* ([ChroniclingAmerica.LOC.gov](http://ChroniclingAmerica.LOC.gov)). This site provides state-by-state information about newspapers published since 1690. It also contains several million digitized pages from selected newspapers.
- If your ancestors lived in an ethnic enclave, the local foreign-language press will contain more news of their activities than the mainstream English-language newspapers. This applies to African American and Jewish communities, too, which printed their own news in English.

## Maps

- Another essential source you'll find in libraries is maps. Maps ground in the physical world all the biographical events you discover about your ancestors. Many kinds of maps are available, and they're all useful for genealogy.
- Political maps from different eras show how the boundaries of colonies, territories, states, and counties have changed over the years. Plotting an ancestor's residence on a political map of the period is essential for locating pertinent records. In some cases, a town may no longer exist, but if you can find the town on a political map, you can plot its former location using a modern road map.
- Topographical maps show the terrain in which your forebears conducted their lives. Depending on the era, these maps may also suggest migration routes, whether travel was by river, overland trail, canal, or railroad.

- City and town maps often show every structure on every block. Using the map's legend of symbols enables you to “see” an ancestor's house, store, or neighborhood.
- Panoramic maps were popular in the 1880s and 1890s. They are remarkably accurate in showing cities and towns from a bird's eye view.
- Like newspapers, maps are proliferating on the Internet. Such sites as TopoZone.com and MapQuest.com may be helpful, but be aware that these sites display political maps of the contemporary world, not the world of your ancestors. Historical maps can be found on genealogy sites and the sites of libraries, archives, and historical societies.
  - At USGenWeb.org, you may select a particular state and county and link to online maps of varying years. FamilySearch.org provides links to maps found on other sites, including maps of foreign countries.
  - The U.S. Geological Survey site—USGS.gov—is particularly helpful for providing both contemporary and historical topographical maps.
  - Hundreds of historical maps have been digitized and uploaded to the sites of libraries with large cartographic collections, such as the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, university libraries, and state libraries.
- Note, too, that not everything is on the Internet. The National Archives and the Library of Congress in Washington DC have extensive cartographic collections. State and local libraries, university libraries, and historical societies all maintain map collections, particularly maps of their respective areas.

- Two search tools that are closely related to maps are gazetteers and atlases.
  - *Gazetteers* are alphabetical listings of the places in a county, state, or nation, and they exist from different periods. They are essential for locating the ancestral places you find mentioned in historical sources. Gazetteers are available online and in the library, but bear in mind, you may need to consult a historical gazetteer to locate places that no longer exist.
  - An *atlas* is a collection of maps bound together into a single volume, such as an atlas of the United States or an atlas of Italy. Historical atlases, such as an atlas of the German Empire in 1871 or an atlas of westward migration trails in the United States, are indispensable for genealogists.

### Suggested Reading

Meyerink, *Printed Sources*.

Morgan, *How to Do Everything*, especially chapter 3, “Balance Traditional and Electronic Research.”

Pfeiffer, *Hidden Sources*.

### Assignment

Search the online catalogs of libraries in your vicinity to learn what genealogical materials they have. Use key subject headings, such as genealogy, biography, history, and the like. Also search under specific terms, including your ancestors’ names; states, counties, and towns where they lived; professions, businesses, or trades; and other topics that have surfaced in your research, such as colonial militia, indentured servitude, slavery, cattle ranching, dairy farming, the Spanish-American War, and so on. Then, visit a library; you’ll be astounded by all you’ll find on its shelves!

# Military Service and Homestead Records

## Lecture 4

Where were your ancestors during the War of 1812? Did forefathers of yours fight in the American Revolution, the Civil War, or one of the many campaigns out West? Millions of Americans have served in the U.S. armed forces, which means that military records are a major source for genealogists. They are not, however, the only federal records you will find useful. In fact, every time an ancestor of yours interacted with a U.S. government agency—military or civilian—paperwork was generated, and that paperwork fills our National Archives. In this lecture, we'll discuss two types of federal records: military records and homestead files.

### Types of Military Records

- The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) consists of Archives I in Washington DC; Archives II in College Park, Maryland; 13 regional archives; 15 presidential libraries; and 19 storage centers around the country. These repositories hold records of historical value that resulted from the administration of federal law from 1775 to around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier records—those of the colonial period—are found in state archives. NARA holds three kinds of military records: service records, pension records, and bounty land records.
- Service records date from the Revolutionary War to about 1917. They contain the name of the serviceman, his place and time of enlistment, age at enlistment, his unit or ship, and the ranks he attained during his term of service. Service records also record the musters and payrolls for which the serviceman was present; whether he was ever taken prisoner, wounded, or hospitalized; and the place and time of his discharge, desertion, or death.
- Pension records include the application files and the periodic payments disbursed to pensioners for military service rendered from the Revolutionary War to about 1917. Congress granted three kinds

of pensions: pensions for service, that is, for serving a specified length of time; pensions for disability, when servicemen sustained disabling injuries; and pensions for widows or other heirs, when servicemen were killed in action. Pension application files contain a great deal of information about both servicemen and their families.

- Bounty land was U.S. government land granted to veterans or their widows or other heirs for military service rendered during wartime between the Revolutionary War and 1856. Eligibility to receive bounty land was established by acts of Congress that were periodically amended, even after the 1856 deadline for qualifying service.
  - Qualified applicants were given a certificate for a specified number of acres, usually 160. This certificate was called a *warrant*. The selection of a parcel of land within the geographic area designated by the applicable law was called *locating the warrant*. Once the land was selected, the veteran or his widow or other heir received a patent for the selected parcel and surrendered the warrant back to the U.S. government.
  - The bounty land records in NARA include both the application files and the surrendered warrants. The amount of information these records provide varies depending on whether it was the veteran himself or his widow or other heir who qualified for the bounty land and whether the land was ever located. Usually, when both a pension and bounty land were applied for, the bounty land documents were included in the pension application file.
- NARA has many records pertaining to World Wars I and II but not individual personnel files. Those are housed in the National Personnel Records Center, Military Personnel Records (NPRC-MPR), in St. Louis, Missouri. If you'd like to obtain the service record of a relative who served in the U.S. military since about 1917, visit the National Archives website and follow the instructions for securing a copy of a record from the NPRC-MPR.





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**Millions of Americans have served in the U.S. armed forces, and their experiences constitute an important, engaging, and often poignant part of every family's history.**

- Pension files dating from World War I and later are still in the custody of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Visit [VA.gov](http://VA.gov) to learn the procedure for examining pension records at the VA office closest to where you live.

### **Obtaining Military Records**

- To get the military record of an ancestor who served before World War I, you need to know his full name, his unit (that is, his company and regiment) or his ship, his rank, and the dates of his service. You can find these facts in a number of ways:
  - Search online databases. Fold3.com and Ancestry.com, to cite just two examples, have databases of military service members from the Revolutionary War into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The National Park Service has an excellent online database called the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System. In addition, the websites of many state archives contain databases of men who served from various states.

- Search name indexes on microfilm; these are available at NARA facilities, the worldwide family history centers of the LDS Family History Library, and some public libraries.
- Consult books in the library. Much military service information has been published in the form of rosters and transcribed records. In addition, pension rolls were published periodically on a state-by-state basis. For officers, there are directories, such as the *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* and the *List of Officers of the Navy of the United States and of the Marine Corps, 1775–1900*.
- Once you know the three basic facts of your ancestor's service—unit or ship, rank, and dates of service—go to the National Archives website and download NATF Form 86 for the service record and NATF Form 85 for the pension or bounty land file. Fill in the information and mail the form with the requisite check to the National Archives. A photocopy of the military record will be mailed to you. To obtain digital records, follow the instructions on the NARA website.

### Working with Military Records

- As you conduct your search of military records, remember that many servicemen had the same or similar names. It may be necessary for you to examine several military records to identify the one that pertains to your ancestor. Because the biographical data given in a service record are so scant, you may have to look for additional corroborating facts. In particular, you might look for your ancestor's obituary in a local newspaper.
- Remember, too, that military records are documents created by numerous agencies over the course of 150 years. They're extremely diverse in form and content.
- Keeping a "personnel file" for every individual serviceman is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century innovation. Evidence of military service prior to World War I must be gathered from names appearing in registers

of enlistments, muster and pay rolls, rendezvous reports, post and regimental returns, lists of prisoners and prisoner exchanges, medical records, and other early sources.

- Fortunately for genealogists, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the War Department, using these myriad sources, created a Compiled Military Service Record for every man who served in a “volunteer unit” (units raised for a specific war effort, then disbanded after the war).
- Unfortunately, the War Department did not compile such records for men who served in the regular army, navy, and Marine Corps. Thus, evidence of service in the standing armed forces remains scattered among diverse records.
- The good news is that most of the men who served from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War served in volunteer units. The regular armed forces maintained by the United States were quite small. The largest was the army, and NARA’s *Registers of Enlistments in the U.S. Army, 1789–1914* can help you discover the unit, rank, and dates of service of men who served in the army.
- Many men who did not serve in the military may well have registered for a military draft. Available from NARA and online are records of men who registered for the Civil War drafts of 1863 and 1864 and the World War I drafts of 1917 and 1918.

### **Homestead Files**

- Congress passed the Homestead Act in 1862. It was signed into law by President Lincoln and took effect on January 1, 1863. The Homestead Act granted 160 acres of land in the public domain to any applicant, man or woman, able to improve it and pay the fee of \$6.00. The public domain was land owned by the federal government.
- The *entryman* was required to build a house, plant crops, and reside on the land for five consecutive years. Foreign-born entrymen also

had to become citizens. At the end of five years, if all requirements were met, the U.S. government conveyed the patent to the land to the homesteader. Hundreds of thousands of Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Germans, and Irish—as well as Americans—took advantage of this offer of land.

- NARA houses the homestead files. These records encompass 33 public domain states from 1863 up to the 1970s. Files for entrymen who did not complete the requirements are included among those who succeeded in obtaining a patent.
- The documents in the homestead files are fascinating. In addition to the Certificate of Homestead, you can find annual reports that describe the land and the improvements made to it, such as the addition of houses, barns, wells, and so on. The files of foreign-born homesteaders include naturalization papers. In addition, homestead files contain any correspondence between the entryman and the General Land Office.
- To find out if a relative of yours was a homesteader, go to the website of the General Land Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management ([GLORecords.BLM.gov](http://GLORecords.BLM.gov)). There, you'll find databases of people to whom the federal government transferred public domain land. Select a state, key in a name, and view the results. If you find your ancestor's name, click on "Patent" and examine the digitized document.
- But remember, homesteading was not the only way to get federal land; some people qualified for bounty land based on military service. Sometimes, too, the federal government transferred land to individuals by sale, lottery, or land rush. All these transfers are represented at the General Land Office website.
- If your search results indicate that the land transfer was made by virtue of the Homestead Act, go to the National Archives website, download and complete NATF Form 84, and mail the form with the required fee to the National Archives. You will receive a photocopy

of the entire homestead file. Or you may purchase a digitized copy of the file through the NARA site. Homestead files are also being digitized and uploaded to the commercial website Fold3.com.

### Suggested Reading

Cerny, Bockstruck, and Thackery, "Military Records."

General Land Office, Bureau of Land Management, [www.glorerecords.blm.gov](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov).

Hatcher, *Locating Your Roots*.

National Archives and Records Administration, *Guide to Federal Records in the National Archives of the United States*.

Scott, "Naval-Records Research in the National Archives."

### Assignment

Learn about federal records from the NARA website and the sites of the regional archives that serve the states where your ancestors lived. Then, using genealogy websites, search online for the military service, pension, or bounty land record of a relative. Also check the website of the General Land Office of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to learn whether an ancestor of yours obtained land from the U.S. government. If your electronic searches fail to provide satisfying results, explore the microfilmed records available from the Family History Library, as well as the books about military service and homesteading discussed in this lecture.

# How to Build Historical Context

## Lecture 5

**T**he lives of your ancestors provide all of the elements of engaging true stories. The challenge is to narrate the facts you've discovered within the larger physical and temporal world in which they were once lived events. If you want to get to know your ancestors, you must see them as real people living in a particular place at a particular time. In other words, the biographical facts you gather must be situated in their proper historical context. As we build historical context in this lecture, you'll see how all the sources we've been discussing come into play.

### Creating Engaging Stories

- A number of elements are essential to creating engaging stories.
  - The first of these elements is setting: A story unfolds in a particular place.
  - Second is action. Every story has a plot.
  - Engaging stories also need characters. With family history, your characters have been given to you: your ancestors.
  - Finally, all good stories contain a theme or conflict, an underlying "how" or "why" that holds the story together and gives it meaning. The lives of your ancestors will inspire many themes.
- In tracing your family tree, you will undoubtedly uncover a great deal of material for some amazing real-life stories, but how do you turn your factual discoveries into a vivid historical narrative about your ancestors? The seven steps for building historical context are as follows:
  - Gather the ancestor's biographical facts.

- Inspect thoughtfully the source for each fact, one fact and source at a time.
- Accumulate other sources in any way relating to the life event under study.
- Examine each of these sources in light of local history—that is, what was happening socially, politically, and economically in that place at that time.
- Form a hypothesis about how this real-life event transpired.
- Test your hypothesis against the contents of all the sources collected—and any others that this process reveals you should consider.
- Conclude—to the greatest extent possible—what the past likely was.

### **Case Study: Using Primary Sources**

- Let's imagine that you're researching the Steiner family of Vicksburg, Mississippi. You've gotten back to your great-great-grandfather, Jacob Steiner. In the library, you come across a compilation of transcribed records called *Marriages and Deaths from Mississippi Newspapers, 1850–1861*. In it, you find a marriage that fits into your family tree: “Married at the residence of Jacob Morris, Esq., in this city, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1860, by L. S. Houghton, Judge of the Probate Court, Mr. Jacob Steiner to Miss Mary E. Hill.” You enter the data onto your pedigree chart and your family group sheet: Jacob Steiner married Mary E. Hill; January 19, 1860; Vicksburg, Mississippi.
- You now have a biographical fact, but as a family historian, you're interested in more than just the bare fact of a wedding. How was this wedding different from the many other weddings in your family tree? What did it mean to get married in Vicksburg in 1860? Who was Jacob Morris, and why did Jacob Steiner and Mary Hill

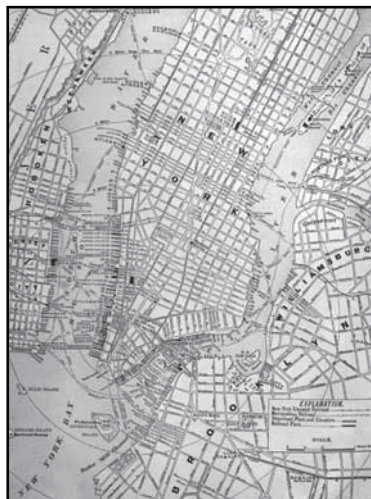
get married at his residence? Why was the couple joined by a civil magistrate, not a man of the cloth?

- Note how just one biographical fact raises many questions. Answering those questions will allow you to build the historical context of the event. And that historical context will turn these dry, impersonal data into a particular wedding that actually happened. The next step, then, is to gather sources to answer the questions.
- The 1860 census reveals only one Jacob Morris residing in Vicksburg. His birthplace is given as Belgium, and his occupation is listed as “boarding,” which means he owned boarding houses. His real estate was worth \$20,000, and his personal estate was worth \$3,000. His wife, Catherine, was from Germany, but their daughter was born in Mississippi. We know, then, that we’re dealing with a German-speaking immigrant family, belonging to the mercantile class.
- Digging deeper into the 1860 census, we learn that Jacob Steiner and his wife, Mary, lived close to Jacob Morris. The birthplace of both Jacob and Mary is given as Germany, and Jacob’s occupation is listed as “merchant.”
- The deed books in the Warren County Courthouse show that Jacob Morris purchased his first property in Vicksburg—lots 10 and 11 in Square I—in 1854. The plat book of Vicksburg shows that these lots are on the corner of Levee and Clay Streets, and the city directory lists Morris as the owner of a coffee house at that location, with his residence in the same place. We now know that Jacob Steiner and Mary Hill were married in the apartment above Morris’s coffee house.
- In researching an urban family, it’s always smart to look for maps that show the city when the family lived there.
  - One outstanding collection of city maps was created by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Sanborn maps show every structure on



every block and indicate what each structure was; how many stories it had; whether it was frame or brick; whether the roof was slate, shingle, or tin; and so on.

- Unfortunately, the earliest Sanborn map of Vicksburg dates from 1886, not 1860. It shows that the structure on the corner of Levee and Clay Streets was two stories, brick, and vacant. Next door to it one of Morris's original boarding houses was still standing. This



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**Old maps ground the facts you discover about your ancestors in the physical world.**

block had numerous rooming houses, saloons, and warehouses because it was located on the Mississippi River. And that location tells us a great deal about the context in which Jacob Steiner and Mary Hill were married—in the heart of a bustling port.

- A topographical map of Vicksburg from 1863 shows the few buildings standing in Square I at that time, including the businesses of Jacob Morris. The land along the Mississippi is low and marshy, but steep bluffs rise up to much higher terrain, where most of the city is built on neat squares. Up there were the elegant brick houses of the city's American-born inhabitants, interspersed with mercantile establishments, offices, government buildings, and rows of shanties housing African American families.
- Pictures also contribute to historical context. Engravings, paintings, prints, and photographs bring your family stories to life. In

particular, look for two illustrated newspapers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century: *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, both available on microfilm. An 1862 issue of *Harper's Weekly* features a full-page panorama of Vicksburg, depicting the city from the vantage point of the Mississippi River.

- One other item to check in re-creating events is the weather. *The Vicksburg Weekly Sun* for January 23, 1860, indicates that the previous Thursday was “warm and sunny.” You should also examine the newspaper for any other events that might personalize the event you’re researching.

### Case Study: Using Local History

- The next step in your research is to turn to published local history to learn who these German-speaking immigrant families were and how they fit into society. You find exactly what you need in the library: a book titled *In and About Vicksburg: An Illustrated Guide Book to the City, Its History, Its Appearance, Its Business Houses*, published in 1890.
- This source tells you that since the late 1840s, Vicksburg was home to a small, close-knit community of German-speaking merchants of mixed religion. Astute and hard-working, these newcomers did not amass fortunes, but they garnered a solid position for themselves in the urban bourgeoisie. Further, members of this community intermarried. Their common Germanic roots, linguistic and cultural heritage, and shared immigrant experience and social status outweighed their differences of religion.
- This discovery prompts additional research. The burial records of the Jewish congregation in Vicksburg and the tombstone inscriptions in the Jewish cemetery there explain a great deal about the Steiner-Hill marriage.
  - Jacob Morris was Jewish, but his wife, Catherine, was Roman Catholic. Jacob Morris had a business colleague, Jacob Steiner, who was Jewish. And Catherine had a younger sister, Mary Hill, a Catholic, recently arrived from Hesse-Darmstadt.

- That understanding explains why, on January 19, 1860, the Jewish business partner and the Catholic younger sister were married in Morris's parlor by a civil magistrate. There was no synagogue in Vicksburg or rabbi prior to 1867; thus, a Jewish ceremony wasn't possible.

## Process Review

- Let's review the process for building historical context around an ancestral event.
  - Gather the ancestor's biographical facts. We started with the marriage data for Jacob Steiner and Mary Hill.
  - Inspect thoughtfully the source for each fact, one fact and source at a time. Examining the marriage announcement raised several issues to be explored.
  - Accumulate other sources in any way relating to the life event under study. We examined the 1860 census, a city directory, deed books, a Sanborn map, a topographical map, the panoramic view from *Harper's*, and *The Vicksburg Weekly Sun*.
  - Examine each of these sources in light of local history—that is, what was happening socially, politically, and economically in that place at that time. From the book *In and About Vicksburg*, we learned about the German-speaking business community and the intermarriages among Jews, Catholics, and Protestants.
  - Form a hypothesis as to how this real life event transpired. We posited that the Steiner-Hill wedding may have been Jewish or of mixed religion.
  - Test your hypothesis against the contents of all the sources collected—and any others that this process reveals you should consider. We consulted the records of the Jewish congregation in Vicksburg and the Jewish cemetery tombstones.

- Conclude—to the greatest extent possible—what the past likely was. We concluded that the Steiner-Hill marriage was indeed a union of a Jew and a Catholic.
- Of course, you won't always find as many pertinent sources as we did for the Steiner-Hill marriage; however, even when specific evidence is lacking, it may be possible to get at least an impression of what an ancestor's life was like based on the general history of his or her time and place.
- Note, too, that it's possible to write your family history in small, focused episodes. You needn't write an entire history of every generation. Instead, write brief narratives as you progress in your research. Pick an event you find fascinating and recount it, or describe an ancestor's home or business or an heirloom. Share what you learn with your relatives in the form of a blog or a simple pamphlet.
- The story of the Steiner-Hill wedding has an interesting epilogue: An entry in the marriage register of St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church tells us that Jacob and Mary were married there in October of 1865, shortly after Jacob's service in the Confederate cavalry ended and before the birth of their child.

### Suggested Reading

Colletta, "Developing Family Narrative from Leads in Sources."

Filby, *A Bibliography of American County Histories*.

*Putting Family History into Historical Context: Special Issue*.

Schlereth, *Artifacts and the American Past*.

———, ed., *Material Culture Studies in America*.

Sturdevant, *Bringing Your Family History to Life through Social History*.

Wright, *The Genealogist's Handbook*.

## Assignment

Select an ancestral event from your pedigree chart—a birth, a marriage, military service, or an immigration experience—and build the historical context around it. Follow the seven-step process demonstrated in this lecture to draw a conclusion about the real-life experience of your ancestor.

# Your Ancestors in Ship Passenger Lists

## Lecture 6

Most Americans climbing their family trees will eventually reach ancestors who immigrated from foreign realms. In this lecture, then, we will explore passenger arrival records—the most precious documents for reconstructing the saga of your ancestors' voyage to North America. Of course, the content of these records varies a great deal, but they generally supply the following facts: the name and type of ship on which your forebears traveled, the ship's points of embarkation and arrival, and the dates of departure and arrival. Passenger lists also show whether your ancestor traveled alone or with relatives, and ships' manifests may include many other personal facts.

### Beginning a Search of Ship Records

- To find your ancestor's passenger arrival record, you'll need some basic information: the immigrant's full original name, his or her approximate age, and a timespan for the voyage (perhaps three to five years). These guideposts reduce the parameters of your search and ensure that you'll be able to identify your ancestor's record with certainty when you find it.
- You may be able to find these guideposts from your interviews with relatives, your immigrant ancestor's obituary, or earlier research discoveries.
- For example, we've already seen that U.S. censuses since 1850 contain a column for recording each person's place of birth. You'll know you've reached an immigrant when a country other than the United States appears in that column. U.S. censuses since 1900 also provide the year of immigration of foreign-born residents.

### Sources for Pre-1820 Arrivals

- The U.S. government did not start keeping accounts of passengers arriving in this country until 1820, but there are several other sources

that may contain information on immigrants before that year. These records have been published in historical and genealogical journals, in books, and on the Internet.

- Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lists of passengers boarding ships bound for the New World have survived and are found today in the archives of the colonial powers—Spain, France, the Netherlands, and England. Many of these old manifests have also been published in books, in historical journals, and online.
- Colonial and land records may state when the original grantee arrived in America and may sometimes name the ship. Again, many of these are available in books of transcribed records, and many are available on the Internet, particularly at the sites of state archives.
- Non-British citizens arriving in the British colonies were required to swear oaths of allegiance to the English king. Lists of those who took the oath have been published over the years.
- Many directories have been compiled that list immigrants arriving in America by name, usually targeting a particular span of years and country of origin. A great many of these have been scanned and uploaded to Internet genealogy sites. One monumental example is Peter Wilson Coldham's *Bonded Passengers to America*. This nine-volume set names thousands of English and Irish indentured servants who came to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Likewise, many directories have been compiled that list emigrants departing from foreign countries on ships to America. These focus generally on a particular country of origin and time period. A great many of these volumes have been scanned and are now available as databases at Internet genealogy sites. One classic example is David Dobson's six-volume set titled *Directory of Scottish Settlers in North America, 1625–1825*.

- Scholars have compiled into monographs the names of the first families to populate a particular colony, county, or city. One such compilation is Amandus Johnson's two-volume work, *The Swedish Settlements on the Delaware, 1638–1664*.
- Of course, there is also an enormous corpus of historical literature about the peopling of North America in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Numerous scholarly books and articles discuss the various national, ethnic, racial, and religious groups that settled early America, and many of these works name specific individuals. One excellent example is Carl Brasseaux's *The Founding of New Acadia*. This book describes the beginnings of Cajun settlement in Louisiana and lists by name several hundred of the earliest settlers.
- Finally, a tremendous amount of material about early American settlers is now available online. Enter key terms into your computer's browser to bring up sites about your immigrant ancestor's colony, state, county, or city. You can also search using terms pertinent to any groups your ancestor belonged to, such as "Mennonites" or "Jamestown settlers."
- The most comprehensive index to this universe of immigrant literature is P. William Filby's multivolume set titled *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*. These thick volumes list more than a million immigrants by name, and each entry has a citation to the source where the information was found.
- For ancestors in 17<sup>th</sup>-century New England, the first source to go to is the website of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, which documents all immigrants to New England between 1620 and 1643 and lists their descendants for several generations.
- For 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century immigrants, be sure to check ImmigrantShips.net. Volunteers have uploaded transcriptions of more than 14,000 ship manifests to this site, and more appear every day.



- Of course, not every search for an immigrant in the pre-1820 period will be direct and readily confirmed. You may need to delve into the vast literature available in the library and online about the colony or state, county, or city where your immigrant ancestor first appears.

### **Sources for Arrivals from 1820 to the Early 1950s**

- Passenger lists from 1820 to about 1891 are called Customs Passenger Lists because it was the responsibility of the U.S. Customs Bureau to keep them. The data they contain about each passenger are scant—only name, age, sex, occupation, and country of origin.
- Lists from about 1891 through the early 1950s are called Immigration Passenger Lists because jurisdiction over this matter shifted to the Office of Immigration. In addition to each passenger's name, age, sex, occupation, and country of origin, the information these lists contain gradually expanded to include marital status, race, ability to read and write, name and address of closest relative in the native country, intended destination in the United States, physical description, town of birth, and more.
  - The original manifests were microfilmed and have been uploaded to the Internet. Because these are federal records, you'll find a thorough explanation of them—what ports and years they cover—at NARA's website.
  - Key websites containing digitized copies of the passenger lists and capabilities for searching them include EllisIsland.org, Ancestry.com, and CastleGarden.org. When the beginning facts you have to work with are sketchy, a helpful website that provides a variety of alternative strategies for searching online passenger lists is SteveMorse.org.
- If searching the Internet does not yield results, you can turn to microfilm and book indexes. To access these, check the online catalogs of the Library of Congress and the LDS Family History Library.



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**For most Americans, ship passenger lists are the touchstone of the most thrilling and momentous episode of their family saga: the journey from the Old World to the New World.**

### Using Later Sources

- To search for an ancestor who arrived between 1820 and the early 1950s, start with the immigrant's name, approximate year of arrival, and approximate age at arrival. In addition, you may need to know a corroborating fact or two about the ancestor to confirm that you've found the right record.
- To find the ship manifest, you first find the name of your ancestor (or a likely candidate) in one of the databases, indexes, or books described above, then use that information to access the original passenger list on microfilm or online. This process sounds simple, but finding the arrival record of one passenger among millions can be tricky.
- As always, when searching any database or index, keep in mind several possible variant spellings for the family name. Also consider a range of five or six years for an ancestor's age, as well as a span of several years for the date of arrival in America.

- If you're stymied in your search for an ancestor's ship, you might also check some alternative sources.
  - Although most immigrants between 1820 and the early 1950s arrived at one of the five major ports—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or New Orleans—thousands also came in through minor ports, such as Providence, Rhode Island; Charleston, South Carolina; Mobile, Alabama; and others. The websites mentioned earlier, as well as indexes on microfilm and in books, cover as many as 60 minor ports.
  - Thousands of immigrants entered North America at Canadian ports, then traveled south to the United States. The U.S. government kept no record of these immigrants before 1895, but from 1895 through 1954, detailed lists and name indexes are available online and on microfilm. (Search for “Canadian Border Crossings” or “St. Albans, Vermont, Arrival Lists.”) For records of passengers who arrived at Canadian ports before 1895, consult the website of the Library and Archives of Canada.
  - Many thousands of people from Central and South America, as well as European countries, entered the United States through stations along the southern border, such as Nogales, Arizona, and El Paso, Texas. Federal records of these arrivals date from about 1903 to 1905, depending on the particular station, and they, too, are now available online and on microfilm. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Europeans sailed to South American ports, then traveled north into the United States by railroad.
  - Lists of passengers leaving for America were compiled by foreign countries, and some of these records have been published online. The Hamburg Emigration Lists, 1850–1934, and the Danish Emigration Archives, 1869–1908, are two examples. The Immigrant Ancestors Project at Brigham Young University adds newly discovered European departure lists continually to its website. If you find your ancestor's name on

a departure list, you can often use the name of the ship, port and date of embarkation, and U.S. port of destination to find his or her arrival record in the United States.

- To find out what port of departure your ancestors used, you might start by reading a history of their native country. National histories often discuss the routes and ports used by the emigrants. In addition, genealogy manuals are available for researching just about every national, ethnic, and racial ancestry imaginable. Written by experts in the field, they describe available sources and how to access and use them.
- Finally, look for a classic resource titled *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*, which includes a multipage table that describes departure lists for quite a few European ports. Remember, too, that before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, emigrants from many non-European lands—including the Middle East and north Africa—had to travel to a European port to board a ship bound for America.

### Suggested Reading

Colletta, *They Came in Ships*.

Meyerink, ed., *Printed Sources*, especially chapter 14, “Immigration Sources.”

National Archives and Records Administration, *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*.

Potter, “St. Albans Passenger Arrival Records.”

Prechtel-Klusdens, “Mexican Border Crossing Records.”

Smith, “The Creation and Destruction of Ellis Island Immigration Manifests.”

### Assignment

After you’ve traced a branch of your family tree back to the immigrant ancestor, search for his or her arrival record. If your ancestor arrived in America before 1820, consult the variety of sources published online and in

print—especially the *Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*—discussed in this lecture. If your ancestor arrived in the United States between 1820 and the early 1950s, search the U.S. passenger arrival lists digitized at several Internet sites, predominantly Ancestry.com and EllisIsland.org. If your electronic search does not yield a sure result, make use of microfilm copies of the lists, as well as abstracts and transcriptions of them printed in books.

# Your Ancestors in Naturalization Records

## Lecture 7

**N**aturalization records disclose many answers to questions about your immigrant ancestors. What's more, many of these records provide additional biographical details that you'll be fascinated to learn. However, just as we saw with passenger arrival records, a few basic facts—or, at least, a few estimates or hypotheses—are required to get a record search underway: your ancestor's name, approximate date of birth, native country, the state or colony where your ancestor resided when naturalized, and the approximate year of naturalization. In this lecture, we'll learn where you can find this preliminary information and how you can search for the naturalization record itself.

### Searching for Naturalization Records

- To find the naturalization record of an ancestor, you'll need to know his or her name, approximate date of birth, native country, state or colony of residence when naturalized, and approximate year of naturalization. This preliminary information is available in a variety of places.
  - Some federal censuses, state censuses, and voter rolls contain information about the citizenship status of foreign-born individuals.
  - Homestead files contain the naturalization documents of foreign-born entrymen, and U.S. passport applications of foreign-born applicants include both the name of the court and the date of naturalization. Passport applications from 1795 through 1925 are available on microfilm and online.
  - If you have inherited an ancestor's certificate of citizenship, that document will contain the facts you need to secure a copy of the original court record. In addition, a great deal of naturalization information is available on the Internet.

- Searching for naturalization records requires two steps: (1) Using the basic facts about your immigrant ancestor, find his or her name in one of the databases, indexes, or books described in this lecture, and (2) use the data given in that source to access and examine the original record or a copy of it on microfilm or online.

### **Naturalizations before 1790**

- Beginning in the 1600s, most British colonies in North America had a statute providing for the naturalization or denization of non-British residents. (*Denization* was a legal process that granted some but not all rights of citizenship.) For example, a German living in Pennsylvania could become a citizen of Pennsylvania. Requirements for citizenship and the benefits of citizenship varied from colony to colony.
- In 1740, an act of Parliament provided for the naturalization of non-British residents in British colonies, provided that they were white males, 21 years of age or older, owned land, and were Protestant. Thus, a Norwegian living in Delaware, for instance, could become a citizen of Great Britain. Requirements and benefits were uniform for all colonies.
- The records of these colonial-period naturalizations are part of the acts of the colonial assemblies, which have been microfilmed and transcribed in books and are now appearing online at the websites of state archives. The most comprehensive index to colonial-period naturalizations is Lloyd deWitt Bockstruck's *Denizations and Naturalizations in the British Colonies in America, 1607–1775*.
  - If you find an ancestor's name in this index, and the country of origin, colony, and year of naturalization seem to fit, you have completed the first step in the research process.
  - The second step is to secure the original act on microfilm, in a book, or online and examine it to confirm that it is indeed your ancestor's. Sometimes, unfortunately, the information recorded in the act is insufficient to identify the individual with certainty.

- Two other facts are important to keep in mind when researching pre-1790 naturalization records:
  - In 1776, the Continental Congress decreed automatic citizenship for native-born children of European parents. In other words, children of European parents born in any state were citizens of that state, without undergoing any naturalization process.
  - In 1778, the Articles of Confederation established common citizenship for the country. Henceforth, a citizen of any state was a citizen of the entire United States.

### Naturalizations from 1790 to 1906

- The class of aliens eligible for citizenship under congressional statute in 1790 was limited to free white persons, 21 years of age or older, who had resided in the United States for at least two years. The wife of an immigrant and children under the age of 21 who were born overseas received what was called *derivative citizenship* when the immigrant naturalized. Thus, married women and minor children did not have to go through any naturalization procedure on their own.
- The 1790 law was replaced in 1795 with one that mandated a two-step procedure that would continue in practice into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - First, after residing in the United States for two consecutive years, an immigrant could go to any court of public record and declare his or her intention to become a citizen.
  - After three more years of consecutive residency in the United States (reduced to two years in 1824), the immigrant could go to any court of public record with a U.S. citizen to vouch for his or her good moral character and petition for naturalization.
  - Thus, for most immigrants, two records were created: the declaration of intention and the petition for naturalization. Sometimes, these documents are called *first papers* and *final papers*.



- Note, however, that the 1824 law that reduced the residency requirement also allowed for immigrants under the age of 18 to petition for naturalization on arrival in the United States without filing a declaration of intent.
- Note, too, that the declaration and petition did not have to be filed in the same court. Nor did aliens have to file in a court of their state or county of residency. Any court of public record was sufficient.
- Other milestones of naturalization law that may affect your research include the following:
  - The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1868, affirmed the citizenship of Americans of African descent.
  - In 1870, Congress restricted U.S. citizenship to “white persons and persons of African descent.” Asian immigrants could not naturalize.
  - In 1922, the Supreme Court found that Japanese immigrants were not eligible for citizenship. Also as of 1922, married women were required to file separately from their husbands. Derivative citizenship no longer applied to wives.
  - In 1924, Native Americans were made citizens of the United States.
  - As of 1940, children under the age of 21 no longer became citizens automatically upon the naturalization of their fathers. They had to file separately after coming of age.
  - Finally, a 1952 law rescinded the ban on Asian immigration and naturalization.
- If you find more than one record bearing your ancestor’s name, you can identify the correct record in three ways: (1) by verifying the country of origin, (2) by comparing the signature on the declaration



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Some immigrants evidently saw no advantage in citizenship; others intended to participate fully in the self-determination offered by America as soon as the law allowed.

or petition with your ancestor's signature on other documents, or (3) by identifying the witness named in the petition, who was often a relative of the petitioner.

### **Nineteenth-Century Declarations and Petitions**

- The content of 19<sup>th</sup>-century declarations and petitions varies tremendously in different courts across the states and territories. In general, these records reveal the immigrant's age, occupation, country of origin, and year of immigration. Sometimes, they indicate the precise date, port, and ship of arrival.
- Naturalization records dating from 1790 through 1906 are in repositories across the country. Remember, immigrants could file in any court of public record, and there are three levels of these courts:

federal, state, and city. To find your ancestor, follow the two-step process mentioned earlier.

- First, search the pertinent databases and indexes for your ancestor's name. If you find the name, the database or index will indicate the court and date of naturalization.
- With that information, you can access and view the record online or on microfilm, or you can secure a photocopy of the original from the repository that holds it.
- Where can you find the pertinent databases and indexes?
  - First of all, the National Archives website contains a summary history of naturalization law and describes the records filed in federal courts in all the states and territories.
  - Then, search websites that contain databases of names of naturalized citizens with the essential facts of their naturalization, such as Ancestry.com, Fold3.com, AccessGenealogy.com, GenealogyBank.com, and FamilySearch.org. Particularly important are the websites of state archives.
  - You might also try the sites of historical societies, genealogical societies, and libraries. For instance, if you go to the website of the Italian Genealogical Group, you may search millions of naturalization records from New York City-area courts.
  - If you can't find results on the Internet, you can also find indexes to millions of naturalization records published on microfilm and in books. For these, check the online catalogs of the Library of Congress and the LDS Family History Library, as well as the NARA website.
- As mentioned earlier, the repositories for naturalization records may be in federal, state, or local courts.
  - If your ancestor filed for naturalization in a federal court, that record is among the federal court records in the NARA regional archives that serves the state where he or she filed.

- If your ancestor filed in a state court, that record is among the state court records in the state archives, or it may still be in the county courthouse where the immigrant filed.
- If your ancestor filed in a municipal court, that record is in the city archives, or it may have been transferred to the state archives.

### **Naturalizations since 1906**

- In 1906, Congress created the Immigration and Naturalization Bureau. As of that date, standardized forms were mandated for all courts nationwide that performed naturalizations. In addition, a central office was established, and all courts of public record were required to forward to this office a duplicate of every naturalization filed with them.
- Securing a record made since September 27, 1906, is easy. Simply follow the directions on the website of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.
- Twentieth-century naturalizations contain substantially more information than those of the previous century. The petition of a head of household, for instance, shows not only his name, age, place of birth, residence, and date and place of entry into the United States but also the names of his wife and children and their birth years and places.

### **Additional Search Factors**

- Beginning in 1862, veterans of the U.S. armed forces who served in wartime and who were not U.S. citizens could petition for naturalization on honorable discharge. This law was in effect for the Civil War, Spanish-American War, Philippine insurrection, and World War I.
- When the United States acquired territory by treaty or purchase, the people residing there were granted U.S. citizenship without undergoing any naturalization process. You will find naturalization

records for them only if they chose to create a public record of their U.S. citizenship.

### Suggested Reading

Bockstruck, *Denizations and Naturalizations in the British Colonies in America, 1607–1775*.

Green, “Citizenship and Naturalization in Colonial America from Pre-Revolutionary Times to the United States Constitution.”

Meyerink and Szucs, “Immigration Records.”

National Archives and Records Administration, *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States*.

Newman, *American Naturalization Processes and Procedures, 1790–1985*.

Szucs, *They Became Americans*.

### Assignment

Search for the naturalization record of an ancestor of yours from overseas. If a non-British ancestor settled in British North America prior to 1790, consult the published resources described in this lecture. If your ancestor was naturalized between 1790 and 1906, use the online databases and microfilmed indexes to U.S. naturalization records to learn the court and date of the legal action, then secure a copy of the original court record from the appropriate repository. If your ancestor was naturalized since 1906, go to the website of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS.gov) and follow the directions for obtaining a copy of the original court record.

# The Genealogical Proof Standard

## Lecture 8

**S**o far in this course, we've examined a wide spectrum of historical materials, but in this lecture, we'll learn how to judge the reliability of the information we find in order to construct a family tree that is as accurate and true to history as possible. Your training as a family history detective will include the kinds of sources genealogists use, the challenges posed by these sources, and an overview of the Genealogical Proof Standard. We'll then apply the proof standard process in a case study related to establishing identity.

### Types of Genealogical Sources

- Genealogists distinguish between two kinds of sources: original and derivative.
  - An original source represents the first time information is spoken or written down. For example, when a priest baptizes an infant and records the event in the parish register, that's an original source. No record of that baptism existed prior to the one written by the priest.
  - A derivative source is information that is repeated, copied, or transcribed from an original. For instance, if someone publishes a transcription of a baptismal record, that's a derivative source. The transcription is derived from the original.
- The information you find in any source, original or derivative, may or may not be accurate, depending on where that information came from. Thus, genealogists distinguish further between two different kinds of information: primary and secondary.
  - Primary information is data about which the record-maker had firsthand knowledge. For example, the priest knew what day it was when he performed the baptism and the name chosen for the infant. Those parts of the record constitute primary

information, and they tend to be the most reliable information in the record.

- Secondary information is data supplied by someone other than the record-maker. When the priest wrote down the birthdate of the infant, he relied on what he had been told by the parents. Thus, that part of the baptismal record constitutes secondary information, and it is only as reliable as the informant who supplied it.
- Every time you find information about an ancestor, evaluate it carefully in light of these concepts: original and derivative sources, primary and secondary information. Always ask yourself who created the record and why.

### **Source Challenges**

- Both original and derivative sources are essential for building your family tree, but both pose challenges, too.
- Derivative sources are invaluable for providing the foundation for your research in original sources. You first use what's most readily available online and in the library, then you move on to original records in repositories. Derivative sources are printed, which means that they're legible, and they're indexed, which makes them easy to use.
- The biggest drawback of derivative sources is that they are limited. Most historical materials have not been published in any form—electronic, microfilm, or paper. Thus, if you restrict your research to derivative sources, you're accessing only a tiny part of the past. Another disadvantage of derivative sources is their questionable quality. Some editor, compiler, or transcriber has intervened between you and the ancestral event, introducing the possibility for error.
- The greatest advantage of original sources is their amazing variety. Residing in archives, courthouses, libraries, attics, and basements,

original sources record a much larger part of the past. Another plus of original sources is their immediate connection to our ancestors, without the intervention of an editor or transcriber.

- However, as we have seen in earlier lectures, original sources also present challenges. It can be difficult to find, access, and interpret original sources related to your ancestors. These sources are also often fragile or fragmented, may be written in scripts that are hard to read, and may be lacking information or contain errors.
- How can you overcome the obstacles to understanding historical sources? First, consult pertinent reference works, such as specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias, online or in the library. You can also examine other sources bearing on the same event or subject. Note, too, that you may have to consult multiple sources to link one generation to the next.

### **Proving Genealogical Information**

- The Genealogical Proof Standard is a process articulated by the Board for Certification of Genealogists for proving ancestral identities, relationships, life events, and biographical details.
- The process of meeting the standard comprises five steps:
  - Conduct a reasonably exhaustive search for all pertinent information.
  - Create a citation for every source used.
  - Analyze and correlate the collected information.
  - Resolve any conflicts or contradictions.
  - Write a conclusion.

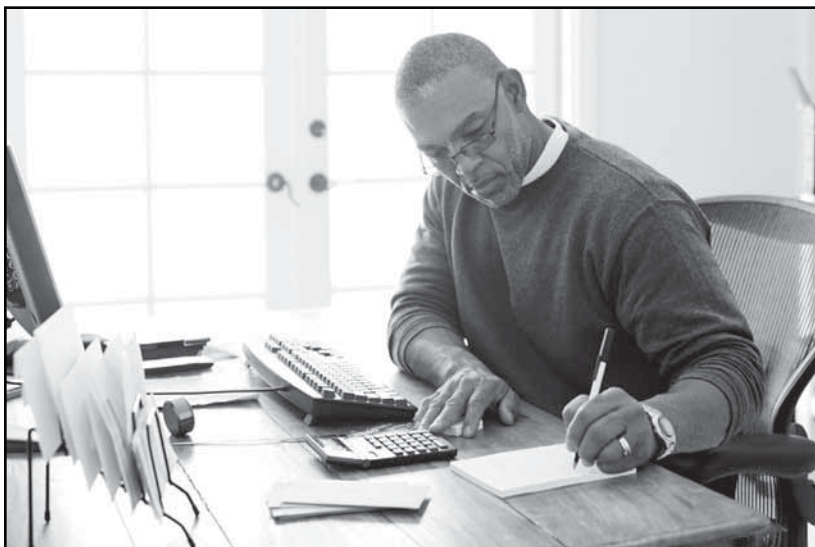
### **Case Study: Steps 1–2**

- J. W. Parberry lived near the Ring & Co. store in Issaquena County, Mississippi. The store was owned by Joseph Ring and his brother



George. Parberry was present at the store on the night of March 4, 1873, when a fire destroyed the structure and killed five people, who had been sleeping in the upstairs apartment. Shortly after the fire, Parberry disappeared from the area. By 1880, records show a J. W. Parberry living in Holmes County, Mississippi. Was it the same man?

- Establishing identity is a classic genealogical problem. Because many people share the same name, the family historian must prove that occurrences of that name in records of different places and times refer to the same person. We can work through the problem using the Genealogical Proof Standard.
- A reasonably exhaustive search for information on J. W. Parberry of Issaquena yielded only four documents:
  - The first document was a sworn statement of George Ring made after the fire to collect on the fire insurance policies held on the business.
  - The second relevant source was a newspaper article reporting the arrest of “a veterinary surgeon by the name of Porberry” in connection with the fire.
  - The third source was another newspaper article reporting that no evidence had been found to connect “Dr. Parberry” to the fire.
  - The fourth source was a summons for Parberry to appear in court, with a note written on the back by the sheriff that the subject could not be found in Issaquena County.
- These documents tell us that Parberry was a Caucasian adult, probably unmarried, and a veterinarian. Within 20 months of the fire, he had left Issaquena County.
- An 1880 census revealed a J. W. Parberry living in Holmes County, Mississippi. He’s listed as an unmarried 52-year-old white man,



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**Keeping a research log ensures that all your source notes are in one place when you start to write your family narrative.**

a native of Virginia. His occupation is given as “doctor.” And he appears to be boarding in a house with other adults. The search for information on this Parberry yielded only two documents: a deed for the purchase of several lots of land in the village of Durant and another land record reporting the sale of those lots to satisfy a debt.

- Step 2 of the standard is to create a citation for each of the sources used. You should keep track of your sources in a research log, noting what you do and don’t find in each one. This log will allow you to refer back to sources if necessary and ensures that you have the citations necessary to support your written conclusion.

### **Case Study: Steps 3–5**

- In our case, step 3 of the proof standard, analyzing information, simply means scrutinizing each of the seven references to J. W. Parberry in light of the issues discussed at the beginning of this lecture: Is the source original or derivative? Who created it and

for what purpose? Is the information original or secondary? If secondary, who provided it? How reliable is that source?

- Correlating the information is the process of comparing it to identify connections and contradictions.
  - In our case, both the Parberrys are called J. W., and they both appear to be single white men residing alone. These facts support the hypothesis that the two Parberrys are indeed the same man.
  - However, the Issaquena County Parberry is called a “veterinary surgeon,” while the Holmes County Parberry is called a “doctor.” There is also a discrepancy in the spelling of the last name: Parberry versus Porberry.
- Both contradictions seem relatively easy to resolve. A veterinarian could well be referred to as a “doctor,” and indeed, both George Ring and the second newspaper article refer to “Dr. Parberry.” The two Holmes County deeds—one for Parberry and one for Porberry—resolve the spelling discrepancy because they both describe the same lots.
- We can be confident in concluding that the J. W. Parberry who resided in Issaquena County in 1873 was the same as the one who resided in Holmes County in 1880.
  - The Parberry case was fairly straightforward, but the cases you encounter in your own research may be more complicated. Proving kinships, such as identifying a man and woman as the parents of an ancestor when no source states that relationship, calls for logic and investigative skills.
  - Detective work is a big part of the fun of genealogy, and adhering to the Genealogical Proof Standard ensures confidence and accuracy in the conclusions you draw.
- To wrap up this lesson in thinking like a detective, let’s consider the nature of evidence.

- Information in itself is neutral, but as soon as you apply information to a specific research dilemma, it becomes evidence, which may support or contradict your hypothesis.
- Evidence is considered to be direct when it is adequate by itself to answer the question under consideration. Evidence is indirect when it is incomplete in itself to answer the question.
- Even though all of the evidence we saw about James W. Parberry was indirect, by processing the information through the Genealogical Proof Standard, we were able to conclude with confidence that the seven sources referred to the same man. We will meet up with the elusive Dr. Parberry again in a future lecture.

### Suggested Reading

Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*.

Colletta, “Tracking a Loner on the Move.”

Devine, “Turning Information into Evidence and Proof.”

*Evidence: A Special Issue of the National Genealogical Society Quarterly.*

Mills, *Evidence Explained*.

Rose, *The Genealogical Proof Standard*.

### Assignment

When your research brings you face to face with a problematic identity, relationship, life event, or biographical detail, apply the five steps of the Genealogical Proof Standard. The process should enable you to deliver a firm conclusion—either supporting or contradicting your hypothesis. As always, be sure to record in your research log what sources you check and what you find or do not find. Keeping track of your research in a log allows you to return to a search at any time and move forward.

# Your Ancestors in the County Courthouse

## Lecture 9

Were ancestors of yours involved in any lawsuits? Did they own land, leave a will, apply for a marriage license, or register a cattle brand? The answers to these questions—and many others—are waiting for you in the courthouse of the county where your ancestors resided. County courthouses hold fascinating records that can paint a vivid picture of the world in which your ancestors lived. Some county records have been removed to state archives for better preservation and easier access; others have been transcribed in books or microfilmed; and many are being uploaded to Internet sites. Visiting a courthouse is still worthwhile, however, because these essential repositories hold original records that are not available anywhere else.

### Land Records

- Records documenting the purchase, mortgage, and sale of land are found in deed books. These transactions were normally recorded in a timely fashion but not always. Sometimes a landowner didn't take his deed to be recorded at the county courthouse until he wished to transfer the title.
- Land records can tell us more than just information about the transfer of property. When it comes to immigrant ancestors, for instance, the purchase of land says two important things: first, that the immigrant had the wherewithal to pay for land, and second, that he was putting down roots in his new country.
- Deed books describe the land in terms of the surveying system in use at the time.
  - For example, according to a homestead file and the deed books in Burleigh County, North Dakota, Ole Hagstrom, a Swedish immigrant, owned land consisting of "the Northeast quarter of Township 143 North, Range 78 West, Fifth Principal Meridian, containing 160 acres." That was a *quarter section*, or a quarter



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**Research in county courthouses is an adventure because each one is unique; some are modern, well-lit buildings, while others are beautiful historic structures.**

- of a square mile, according to what is called the *federal survey system* or *rectangular survey system*.
- But if your ancestors owned land in colonial days, you might find the description in terms of natural landmarks, such as an oak tree, a large rock, or a stream, and measured out in metes and bounds or links and chains. The colonies had their own methods of surveying.
  - To see how a land description in a deed book translates into an actual parcel of earth, you consult the county's plat books. Plat books contain maps that show the location and configuration of land described in deed books.
  - Deed books also record the purchase and sale of livestock and slaves, as well as *manumissions* (the legal procedure by which a slave owner freed a slave). Another type of record found in deed books is the appointment of an attorney-in-fact. In addition,

veterans sometimes took their military discharge certificates to the county courthouse and had the facts recorded in the deed books there. This can be a great help in securing an ancestor's military service record.

## Court Records

- Court records include dockets, minutes, case files, and orders.
  - The docket is the agenda of the court. Once a court decides to hear a case, the case is given a title and number and put on the docket. Normally, each page of a docket contains one or two cases.
  - The minute book records the actions of the court while it is in session. The book includes summaries written by the court clerk as each case is addressed, constituting the public record of cases.
  - The case file or case packet is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow! When a case is closed, all of the relevant papers are gathered, folded twice, tied with a red ribbon, and filed in a cabinet drawer. Here are the initial complaint of the plaintiff and response of the defendant, sworn affidavits, testimony of witnesses, pertinent documents, court summonses, and a record of expenses.
  - The court order book lists the orders or instructions given by the court. These are generally entered chronologically as the judge pronounces them.
- Numerous courts operate on the county level; what these courts are called and their legal jurisdictions vary from state to state and sometimes over time. You may encounter such terms as *probate court*, *surrogate's court*, *orphans' court*, *court of common pleas*, *court of admiralty*, and others. Generally, the two most common courts are circuit and chancery.
  - Circuit court was held twice a year in the *spring term* and *fall term*, or *May term* and *November term*. Cases were carried

over from session to session until closed, which sometimes took several years. The records of the circuit court document disputes and their resolutions.

- Chancery court was held continually or as warranted by the docket. Records of the chancery court pertain to adoption, guardianship, divorce, and wills and probate if there was no separate probate court. Naturalization could be a jurisdiction of either the circuit court or the chancery court.
- Some of the most informative and fascinating court records you'll find are those pertaining to probate, that is, the legal process of settling estates.
  - Probate packets contain the deceased person's last will and testament and all the papers generated in settling the estate. These might include an inventory or appraisement of the personal and real property belonging to the decedent, claims against the estate, and many other documents.
  - Probate records are particularly valuable for genealogy because they name family members and specify how they are related to the deceased person.

### **Vital Records**

- Vital records are records of birth, marriage, and death. Beginning generally in the 1880s—though in some places as early as the 1850s—you'll find registers of births, marriages, and deaths on the shelves of the county courthouse. But precisely which ones you'll find and what years they cover will vary from county to county.
- As we'll see in the next lecture, the registration of life's vital events is a prerogative of state government; thus, many vital records are obtainable through the websites of state archives. Many have also been microfilmed or transcribed over the years and are accessible in libraries. Nevertheless, the registration of births, marriages, and deaths was often made in the county courthouse, not an office in the state capital.



- Divorce cases are found among the chancery court records, but there may be a separate register of divorces among the vital records. Some states required prospective grooms to post bond to get a marriage license, and these, too, are in the courthouse.
- It's important to note that in colonial New England, births, marriages, and deaths were recorded in the town hall, not in any county or state office. These early American vital records are now gathered into state archives.
- Vital records also include coroner's reports, filed by the public official who investigated deaths of a mysterious or suspicious nature. Coroner's reports are not happy reading, but they are another source of interesting information for family historians.

## **Tax Rolls**

- Tax rolls are ledgers that list the owners of taxable property in a county. That property might be real or personal or both, depending on the laws of the state. These lists were compiled annually. They record, for each taxpayer, the taxable property, its assessed value, and the tax obligation.
- Consider the 1851 tax roll of Barren County, Kentucky, as an example.
  - J. W. Parberry, the veterinarian we tracked in Mississippi using the Genealogical Proof Standard, had a brother named William who lived in Kentucky. The 1851 tax roll of Barren County shows that William owned 200 acres on Beaver Creek valued at \$500. He also owned horses and mares valued at \$150.
  - Comparing William's taxable property with that of his neighbors reveals that he was typical. A few neighbors with greater acreage owned slaves (considered taxable property), and a handful of neighbors owned fewer than 200 acres. But most residents of Barren County, like William Parberry, were yeoman tobacco farmers.

- Old tax rolls sometimes reveal telling personal details about ancestors. For example, the 1871 tax roll for Issaquena County, Mississippi, shows that Joseph Ring and his brother George both owned dogs and paid \$0.50 a year tax on them! Note how this historical document reflects the lifestyle of its time and place. In the back country of Issaquena County, hunting was a part of everyday life, and every resident owned a hunting dog or two.

### **Indentures and Apprenticeships**

- Most of the records you find in the county courthouse date from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most county records of the colonial period have been transferred to state archives, which we'll discuss in a future lecture. However, there are two colonial-era records that are particularly relevant if you trace your ancestry back to the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century: indentures and apprenticeships.
- Indenture was a legal practice by which individuals—often, poor immigrants—sold their labor to an employer for a specified period, usually seven years. Only after completing their term of indenture were these servants considered free and independent persons. Many immigrants indentured themselves to pay their passage to America. The practice was particularly common among Irish and German settlers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Newspaper notices posted by irate employers show that some indentured servants ran away before completing their terms of service!
- Apprenticeships worked very much like indentures. A young person—normally, a boy—would be apprenticed to a master tradesman for an agreed-upon number of years to learn a trade. At the conclusion of his apprenticeship, the young man was free to pursue his trade for his own benefit. This often meant that he was free to marry because he could now support a family.
- Records of colonial indentured servitude and apprenticeship have been published in books, on microfilm, or online, while the originals are preserved in state archives.

## Sources for Courthouse Research

- There are many ways to learn what records are available in the courthouse of your ancestors' county. You can begin this search by checking the websites of state archives.
- Two excellent guidebooks discuss, state by state and county by county, what genealogical resources are available: Ancestry's *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources* and Everton's *The Handybook for Genealogists*.
- You may also search the catalog of the Family History Library at FamilySearch.org. Many county records have been microfilmed, and some are now being digitized and uploaded to this site.
- Also visit USGenWeb.org. Click on your ancestor's state, then his or her county, and read about genealogical materials available there.
- If there is a published history of your ancestor's county, read it and pay particular attention to the author's source notes. Those same historical sources may be just what you need for your own research!
- Finally, read a genealogy manual for your ancestor's state.

## Suggested Reading

Eakle, "Court Records."

Family Search, <https://familysearch.org>, especially the Family History Library at <https://familysearch.org/locations/saltlakecity-library>.

Luebking, "Land and Tax Records."

Rose, *Courthouse Research for Family Historians*.

The U.S. GenWeb Project, [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org).

Also visit the websites of individual state archives, which contain detailed information about county records—those transferred to state archives, as well as those still in county courthouses.

## Assignment

Use the Family History Library catalog at [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org) to learn what records have been microfilmed and digitized from the counties where your ancestors resided. Also visit [USGenWeb.org](http://USGenWeb.org) and click through the state and county you're interested in. Finally, visit the state archives site and the official site of the county government to see what records are available online. This exercise should give you a good idea of how much research you can do in county-level records without traveling to the courthouse and what may be available if you visit the courthouse in person.

# Your Ancestors in State Records

## Lecture 10

Was your forefather awarded land for service in his colony's militia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? Did one of your relatives occupy a seat in the state assembly—or serve time in the state penitentiary? Every state has an archives and a library where you can find answers to such questions. Archives usually hold records that resulted from the administration of state laws, such as land, tax, census, and military records; records of public schools, hospitals, prisons, and state courts; and colonial and territorial records. State libraries contain published materials about the state's history. In this lecture, we'll explore the vast array of records held in state archives.

### Overview of State Archives

- Every state has an archives and a library. In some states, the two combined are called the *historical society*; in other states, the historical society is a separate entity housing its own collections. Whatever it's called in your ancestors' state, it has a website, and that website is an essential tool for genealogy.
- To access the website of a particular state archives, simply use your browser or go to the site of the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators ([www.NAGARA.org](http://www.NAGARA.org)). Click on "Member Websites" to link to the one you wish to use. You'll learn from the website the proper terminology for the archival repositories in different states.
- There are two types of state archives: centralized and regional. Centralized archives are located in the state capital, and all their materials are found in that one repository. Regional archives have a principle repository in the state capital, but many of their materials are distributed among designated repositories throughout the state.

- When records are transferred from a governmental agency to an archives, those records are transferred exactly as they were created by the agency. They are not rearranged or reorganized in any way. Therefore, when you want to find something in an archives, you search first for the records of an agency. Within that set of records, you then search for particular items pertaining to your ancestor.
  - Keep in mind that whenever an ancestor's activities intersected with a government agency, a record was created. You may learn that an ancestor served in the Merchant Marine, held a patent on an invention, bought land from the state, or spent time in a state hospital or university. Reading history books about the area where your ancestors lived will help you identify many possibilities.
  - Once you have an idea of how your ancestor may have interacted with a government agency, you use finding aids, such as inventories, checklists, databases, indexes, guides, and catalogs, to identify and access records of the interaction.
  - You learn about these finding aids by consulting the website of the archives. There, you'll find descriptions of the holdings of the archives and the finding aids for accessing them. There is usually an online catalog that allows you to enter key terms to identify records that may pertain to your ancestor. You will also find selected items from the archives' holdings that have been digitized.

### Exploring State Archives

- The home page of the state archives site will provide links to a variety of resources and information pages. You'll often find a link titled "Family History" or "Genealogy Resources." Clicking on it will bring up a page offering links to information about the resources most commonly used by genealogists. At the Oregon State Archives site, for instance, you'll find these resources listed in alphabetical order: Adoption, Census, Land, Military, Naturalization, Probate, and Vital Records.

- Keep in mind that state archives contain enormous quantities of records that are not obviously genealogical in nature, and some states may have records that do not exist in other states. Thus, when the activities of an ancestor inspire you to seek some particular record, you'll turn to the website's online catalog. At the New York State Archives site, for example, the online catalog is called Excelsior.
  - Excelsior catalogs not only the New York State Archives, but the state's library and manuscript collection, as well. Such collections are held by every state archives or library.
  - Manuscript collections include the original papers of individuals, families, businesses, and organizations. Here, you might find the papers of the state's governors, senators, and delegates; prominent business families; fraternal societies; philanthropic or humanitarian organizations; and major industries, such as mining or lumbering.
- To see how an online catalog works, let's look for information on a family that immigrated to the United States in 1830 and settled in Buffalo, New York.
  - A search of Excelsior on the word *Buffalo* yields more than 2,000 hits, such as "Population census of Indian reservations, 1845"; "Registers of commitments to prisons, 1842–1908"; and "Lists of state pupils in institutions for the blind and deaf, 1846–1909."
  - Clicking on the entry for state pupils yields a description of this set of records, which consists of nine volumes arranged by institution. These volumes list students appointed to various private institutions at state expense. Student information includes name, age, town and county of residence, date admitted, length of term, and provider of student's clothing. Each volume is indexed alphabetically by the first letter of the student's last name. This is the kind of detailed information you'll learn about a particular set of records when you use the state archives website's online catalog.

- To examine these lists of pupils, you would have to go to the state archives. There, you would submit a call slip requesting the records, and they would be delivered to your desk. This is typical archival research procedure. Note how using the website of the archives is essential preparation for your research visit.

### Databases, Indexes, and Other Resources

- Databases and indexes on the websites of state archives are growing rapidly. These resources allow you to search online for items pertaining to your ancestors. Then, when you find an item of interest, you can order a copy of it, either electronically or by mail. Of course, you may also visit the archives in person.
- For instance, the Wisconsin State Archives website provides a database of the state's Civil War soldiers. At the Washington State Archives website, there's a county-by-county database of naturalization records. Other databases index other kinds of records; most valuable among these are databases of the states' vital records.
- Between the 1880s and 1910s, every state passed legislation for registering births, marriages, and deaths, and every state has its own laws regarding how old a vital record must be before it is made available to the general public.
  - Today, many state archives websites have databases of the state's birth, marriage, and death records up to a certain year. Alternatively, some state archives sites provide a link to the state's department of vital records. Thus, obtaining copies of vital records is a simple matter.
  - Such records as death certificates may provide a great deal of genealogical information, including the name of the deceased, dates of birth and death, marital status, names of parents and their places of birth, cause of death, place and date of burial, and the name of the informant.
  - As we've seen, vital records are not always accurate in every detail. They contain both primary and secondary information.





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**Vital records, such as birth, death, and marriage certificates, provide a wealth of information for family historians and often suggest other research possibilities.**

Yet even when not entirely correct, vital records may suggest other avenues of research to help you extend your family tree back to earlier generations.

- In addition to databases and indexes, many state archives are now uploading digital copies of original records to their websites. At the website of the Florida State Archives, for example, are all of the state's Confederate pension application files. You can view the original records without completing a form, paying a fee, or sending away for the document.
- Most state archives also hold records created by county and municipal authorities, either in the original forms or as microfilm copies. This enables you to conduct a great deal of research in one place.
  - For example, at the website of the Oregon State Archives, the "Oregon Historical County Records Guide" gives you access to a descriptive inventory of the records of the state's 36 counties.

- Each description concludes with the location of the records. Some are available in the state archives in Salem, while others are still in the individual county courthouses.

## Colonial and Territorial Records

- The archives of states that were once colonies or territories contain a variety of records from the colonial and territorial period, as well as records created since they became states. For example, the earliest census record in the Oregon State Archives dates from 1842, a year before the Oregon Territory even had a provisional government!
  - In addition, quite a few states took population censuses between the years of the federal censuses. State enumerations are valuable because they often contain information not found in the federal censuses, such as citizenship status or length of residency in the state. They may also come in handy simply as evidence that your ancestors were residing in a particular state at a particular time.
  - Most state archives also have the nonpopulation federal censuses, such as the Mortality, Agricultural, and Industrial schedules.
- Naturally, the state archives of the original 13 colonies, from Massachusetts down to Georgia, are larger than others because they're much older. They hold a vast array of treasures from the colonial period. At the website of the archives of Virginia, for instance, you may examine colonial land records dating back to the early 1600s.
- At the archives of Rhode Island, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and the other states that were once British colonies, you may view—either digitized or on microfilm—the acts of the colonial assembly. These include the granting of land, denization and naturalization, military commissions and pensions, and much more.
- The Florida State Archives has digitized and uploaded its unique collection of Spanish land grants. These are land claims filed by settlers of Florida after the territory was transferred from Spain to

the United States in 1821. The archives of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana also hold copies of records documenting their Spanish and French colonial periods.

- Another tremendous asset of all state archives is their collections of historic prints, photographs, and maps. These visual materials depict the world of your ancestors with a power and immediacy that words simply cannot match.

### Suggested Reading

Eichholz, ed., *Ancestry's Red Book*.

Everton Publishers, *The Handybook for Genealogists*.

National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, [www.nagara.org](http://www.nagara.org).

Also look for genealogical research guidebooks for individual states, such as Lipscomb and Hutchison's *Tracing Your Mississippi Ancestors*.

### Assignment

At the websites of the state archives of the states where your ancestors lived, look for databases of names from vital records and learn how to secure copies of birth, marriage, and death records from the appropriate state agencies. Use the online catalog to key in names of organizations, businesses, industries, religious institutions, and so on with which your ancestors were associated. Search results will indicate whether records exist that may contain information about your ancestors. Read about the finding aids available to help researchers identify and use particular sets of records. Finally, enjoy exploring the maps, photographs, newspapers, documents, and other materials that have been digitized and uploaded to the state archives site!

# How to Write Biography

## Lecture 11

**T**hroughout this course, we've explored a broad array of sources for discovering the facts of our ancestors' lives, and we've seen how to depict those facts schematically on pedigree charts and family group sheets. We've also seen how those bare-bones facts may be fleshed out into real-life events, which is what many of us are seeking in genealogy. A narrative genealogy or family history is a collection of biographies of people related by blood—in other words, an anthology of the life stories of kinfolk. In this lecture, we'll see the process of constructing and narrating the biography of an ancestor.

### Building a Biography

- The process of putting together a biography of an ancestor begins with a timeline. You construct this timeline by arranging an ancestor's life events in chronological order from birth to death. The timeline should include not only the key facts of your ancestor's life—birth, immigration, marriages, births of children, and so on—but also information about local contemporary events that may have affected your ancestor, as well as pertinent facts about people with whom he or she associated.
- The next step is to build historical context around each of the events on the timeline. We saw how to do this in Lecture 5, when we discussed the wedding of Jacob Steiner and Mary Hill in the residence of Jacob Morris. The principles we discussed in developing the context of that wedding are the same ones you'll use to bring the key events on your timeline to life.
- The next step is to scrutinize the timeline to see whether you perceive a pervasive theme or a central conflict that typifies your ancestor's life. A core idea or conflict gives focus and cohesiveness to the biography. A central theme is one of the essential elements of an engaging story. For example, when you look at the timeline



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**The timeline of events in your ancestor's life may reveal characteristics—such as an entrepreneurial spirit—that suggest a theme for your biography.**

of your ancestor, you may be struck by a salient characteristic. Was your ancestor adventuresome, ambitious, or a nonconformist? Such characteristics may shape your narrative.

### **Case Study: Identifying a Theme**

- The timelines of Joseph Ring and his younger brother George offer a case study in identifying themes.
- Joseph and George Ring were born into a Germanic family in Lorraine, France; Joseph was born in 1832, and George in 1834. Both work as skilled tradesmen.
- In 1853, at the age of 19, George emigrated to Buffalo, New York. There, in the city's populous German-speaking community, he found a familiar environment, with German parishes, fraternal societies, banks, and stores. But in 1858, George moved far south to

the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, probably seeking to make his fortune in cotton.

- The 1860 census shows George starting out in Issaquena County with no real estate and no personal estate. In 1868, however, he moved to Vicksburg, and the 1870 census records George as a merchant with \$60,000 in real estate and \$20,000 in his personal estate!
- In 1868, George married Catherine, the widow of Jacob Morris. She was almost seven years his senior and had a grown daughter from her first marriage. But she had inherited from Jacob a mortgage-free mansion, several paid-for coffeehouses and boarding houses, and a thriving grocery and liquor business.
- In 1882, at the age of 46, George retired with Catherine to their favorite plantation, Saints Rest, in the heart of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta.
- We can easily see the theme of striving in George's life. He wasn't interested in having children or raising a family. He was always on the move, an ambitious entrepreneur.
- Sometime after George left France, Joseph also came to Buffalo. But when George headed south to seek his fortune, Joseph stayed in New York and married Barbara Miller. The two shared an identical heritage, and they started having a child every two years.
  - In 1865, Joseph finally moved his family to Issaquena County, Mississippi, probably lured there by letters from George, who planned to build a store and warehouse at Rolling Fork Landing. A land deed of 1867 records Joseph joining his brother in this venture.
  - The 1870 census of Issaquena County shows that Joseph was a tenant farmer; he owned no real estate, and his personal estate was valued at \$520. He did, however, have three sons. In the following year, Joseph purchased a farm just east of Vicksburg.

He moved his growing family into a new house there, not far from George and Catherine's grand city residence.

- But then came that fateful night in March of 1873, when Joe traveled upriver to Rolling Fork Landing to attend to business at Ring & Co. On the night of March 4, he was asleep in one of the rooms above the store when the fire started below. In the morning, only a blackened heap of bricks and beams remained of the store, and only a few charred bones were found.
- It also seems that Joseph was on the move for most of his life, but he followed his brother. George was the leader and entrepreneur, while Joseph was content with the conventional life of husband and father. He provided for his family, but clearly, he didn't share the drive of his younger brother, and his efforts came to a tragic end.

### **Writing a Life Story**

- When it comes to writing an ancestor's life story, you may use any number of literary formats. Three common ones are chronological narratives, narratives that begin *in medias res* ("in the midst of things"), and statistical summaries, followed by biography.
  - Narrating the story in chronological order is the most common way to write a biography, and the easiest. Here, you adhere to the timeline from cradle to grave.
  - You might also open the story *in medias res*—essentially, by beginning in the middle, perhaps with a dramatic event, such as the Ring & Co. fire. After you describe the dramatic event, you must backtrack to flesh out the stories of your ancestors, then relate what happened in the aftermath.
  - With the third format, you begin with a statistical summary, consisting of the vital dates and places related to a husband and wife, then tell their story. The biography concludes with an enumeration of children from the marriage, along with their vital dates and places. This format gives away the ending, but

it's commonly used in genealogical journals to let readers know up front whether or not the subject family of an article fits into their tree.

- After you've selected a format, you might sketch an outline of the events in the order you'll use to tell your ancestor's story. This outline will help ensure that the format you've selected is workable and that you include all the salient events in your ancestor's life.
- Before you start writing, you should also decide how you want to tell your version of the story. Possibilities range from simply reporting facts, to recounting events in context, to re-creating historical scenes.
  - Many genealogists seem most comfortable with straightforward, discursive prose. They write with the voice of the researcher, occasionally mentioning sources and explaining their interpretations and conclusions. You might think of this style as *genealogical journalism*.
  - When we hear the term *narrative family history*, we generally think of recounting events in context. Here, episodes are related without mentioning sources. Overall, the style seems more "novelesque."
  - In re-creating historical scenes, you take the recounting of events one step further, using the techniques of creative nonfiction. With this style, you employ the literary techniques of fiction to narrate a nonfiction story.
  - The factual basis of all three versions comes from the same handful of sources. The distinction among them results from the author exploiting the informational content of those sources to a different extent.



## Additional Suggestions

- Create a context file, that is, a collection of notes regarding clothing, flora and fauna, landscape and climate, houses, tools, illnesses, medicines—all kinds of information you may want to include in your narrative. You gather these notes throughout your research activity.
- Keep your ancestor at center stage! While describing the larger context of an ancestor's life, it's easy to lose your focus. Be sure to keep the story centered on the ancestor, not the historical background. The context should serve to vivify some aspect of an ancestor's story, not overshadow it.
- Use different terms to designate an ancestor. Repeating the same name over and over is tedious and says nothing about who that ancestor was. Our ancestors were multidimensional individuals, just as we are. Make that clear in their story by using other descriptors, such as *frontiersman*, *veteran*, *drifter*, and so on.
- Think of the events on an ancestor's timeline as episodes of the total life story. When you write biography, you advance from event to event. Consider each event as a distinct episode, or chapter, in your ancestor's life. This is the idea of writing family history in small pieces.
  - Each episode should begin with a topic sentence to alert the reader that this is a new chapter of the story and to capture the reader's interest.
  - When you reach the end of an episode, don't just stop. The last sentence should bring the topic to a satisfying conclusion. You can round out the episode by returning to the starting point and including a "teaser" that prompts the reader to continue in order to learn more.
- Don't shy away from human emotions. Some family historians are so concerned about creating a lasting account that sounds like a "real" history book that their prose is stiff and lifeless. Life is full of

surprises, disappointments, romance, good luck and bad, suspense, joy, tears, and more. When you tell the story of an ancestor, use literary techniques that evoke these emotions.

- Incorporate oral family tradition into your narrative. Whether the stories you've heard turn out to be true or not is not really the point. What's important is that they reached your ears. Generation after generation, these are the stories by which your family has identified itself and seen its place in the world. Record them for what they are.
- Finally, have someone critique your work, preferably someone who won't sugarcoat his or her opinion. No matter how much care you take in crafting your biographies, candid feedback from a reader will help you improve them.

### Suggested Reading

Carmack, *You Can Write Your Family History*.

Colletta, "Developing Family Narrative from Leads in Sources."

———, "How Typical Were Your Ancestors?"

Vandagriff, *Voices in Your Blood*.

Weitzman, *Underfoot*.

### Assignment

Select one ancestor in your family tree, and create a timeline for that ancestor from birth to death. Build the historical context around the events on the timeline—with as much or as little background as you care to establish. Then scrutinize the contextualized timeline to see whether a predominant theme presents itself. This exercise will equip you to write a lively narrative that will inform and entertain your family for generations to come.

# Dos and Don'ts of Writing History

## Lecture 12

**T**o narrate is to tell a story. To narrate the real-life experiences of our ancestors is to tell their true stories, and the way we do that is through writing. But writing about the past is fraught with snares. In this lecture, we'll consider both the dos and the don'ts of writing historical narrative, enabling you to take as much care in writing the stories of your ancestors as you took to discover them!

### Guidelines for Narrative Writing

- The first guideline for good writing is one we all know: Observe proper grammar and usage. Well-written narratives engage the reader's interest and inspire confidence in the author, but misspelled words, incorrect punctuation, and clumsy phraseology distract the reader's attention from the story you're telling and call into question the credibility of your research. As you compose the stories of your ancestors, whenever you have any doubt about proper English grammar or usage, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* or a similar manual.
- In writing historical narrative, you should try to use period vocabulary and quote from period texts. Nothing evokes other times and places or adds authenticity to your story as vividly as language.
  - In conducting interviews with your relatives, listen for archaic terms, regional idioms, and occupational jargon. You can also pick these terms out of the historical sources you use to build your family tree—censuses, newspapers, letters, diaries, and so on.
  - Note that archaic expressions are often intelligible if you quote them in context. Sometimes, though, you may have to define a word for your readers. But don't let that stop you from using your ancestors' vocabulary! Introducing period language and

quotations from historical sources will make your family stories come to life.

- We experience the world through taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight. As you describe an ancestor's house or business, as you recount an ancestor's military exploits, transatlantic migration, or social activities, think in terms of the five senses. Bring that sensual experience into your prose with carefully chosen adjectives.
  - Consider this description of Hart County, Kentucky, on the eve of the Civil War:

Hart County was a rugged, hilly terrain of tobacco farmers who barely managed to eke out a subsistence living. Undulating fields of burley tobacco, blackish-green in summer and golden-hued in fall, dominated the rolling landscape. Two steam-powered gristmills wheezed and clattered south of the Green River, and one to the north, where steam-powered sawmills also operated with an eardrum-throbbing din. A couple of blacksmiths pounded out farm tools, harness fittings, guns and wagons; one man carded wool in tranquil solitude.

- Telling your family stories in terms of foods, textures, aromas, sounds, and colors ensures that future generations will remember them.
- Another tip for writing historical narrative is to incorporate descriptions of material culture—objects you've inherited from your ancestors, such as a walking stick, a pocket watch, or even a house or barn. The physical things that survive from the lives of your ancestors say



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**When you incorporate material culture into your family history, you reconnect your ancestors to the things that were once theirs and are treasured by other family members today.**

something about who their owners were and what their lives were like; thus, you should pull these treasures into their stories. Describe the heirlooms. Who owned them? Where are they today? How do they reflect the owner's interests, social status, or personality?

- Whenever you introduce speculation in your writing, support it with evidence.
  - Again, consider the following example, which offers speculation about how the wife of J. W. Parberry, Nancy, ended up living in Montgomery, Alabama, after the Civil War.
  - Whether Nancy took her children to Alabama during her husband's military service or afterwards is not known. She may have had no option but to stay at home and endure the war years under Yankee occupation. ... Staying at home, Nancy at least had a roof over her head, some winter provisions, a few hogs and chickens, maybe even Parberry's livestock and feed corn—at least, if the Union troops didn't confiscate them. ... The citizens of Nancy's community would remain trapped under Union occupation for the remainder of the war. Nevertheless, it is possible that Nancy, somehow, found a way to escape to Montgomery, Alabama, the heart of the Confederacy.
  - Notice the use of the larger historical context as evidence to support the idea that Nancy moved after the war. But note, too, the idea introduced in the last sentence that she may have managed to get away during the occupation.

## **Documenting Your Work**

- Documenting your family history simply means citing the sources where you found the information. Documentation is important for several reasons. It confers credibility on your work, allows future researchers to retrace your research process and amend or correct it, and ensures that you've analyzed and interpreted the sources carefully and used them correctly.

- Genealogy software packages usually provide space and functions for citing sources. You may put your source notes on the bottom of the page as footnotes or at the end of the chapter or book as endnotes.
- Beyond citing sources, you can also use notes to cross-reference an article or book pertaining to a subject you address in the text. Another purpose of notes is to explain or add information about something you mention in the text.
- Finally, notes are used to acknowledge the contribution of others to your work. It's common courtesy to thank the relatives, librarians, archivists, and others who may have helped you research and write your family history.
- Again, *The Chicago Manual of Style* shows standard formats for citing books, journal or newspaper articles, and other sources commonly referenced by nonfiction authors. For uncommon sources, such as tombstone inscriptions, ship passenger lists, parish registers, family correspondence and mementoes, and the like, there's a style manual specifically for genealogists: *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace* by Elizabeth Shown Mills.
  - All citations contain essential elements that allow readers to access the source: a descriptive title, significant names, pertinent dates and other numbers (date of creation, volume and page numbers), form of the source consulted (original, photocopy, microfilm, or electronic), and the repository where the source was found.
  - As you document your family narrative, whether it's a genealogy or a family history, consistency is most important. Settle on the forms you prefer and adhere to them throughout your work. And remember, documentation should be just complete enough for readers to find the source. Only rarely will you find it necessary to discuss the source in question—some peculiarity about its reliability, perhaps, or its physical condition.

## **Pitfalls in Historical Writing**

- An important pitfall to avoid in writing historical narrative is making inappropriate historical associations, that is, pairing an ancestral event with a famous contemporary but unrelated event. Here's an example: "Nehemiah Stark was born in a back country cabin of Barren County, Kentucky, on 28 June 1838, the very day that 19-year-old Victoria was crowned queen of England." Appropriate historical context for the birth of Nehemiah Stark would be something happening in Kentucky around the time of his birth, not the coronation of Queen Victoria.
- When writing historical narrative, don't attribute generalizations to specific ancestors. For example, you may have read that most farmers in your ancestor's county raised wheat, but that doesn't necessarily mean that your ancestor did, too. He may have been the one farmer in his county who grew corn. Whenever you make a statement about an ancestor, make sure you have evidence from historical sources to support it.
- Take care not to apply modern meanings to period language. Remember, language changes constantly. Our ancestors used a vocabulary based on the time and place they lived and their own occupations and activities. That vocabulary reflects a world of skills, tools, apparel, and customs that no longer exists; thus, it's easy to misinterpret words you might come across in old records. To avoid this trap, consult dictionaries of historical English.
- Don't be guilty of "presentism," that is, viewing the past through the lens of the present. When you reconstruct the lives of your ancestors, you must accept the historical facts as they are. You shouldn't write about people who lived in a different place and a different era in light of 21<sup>st</sup>-century sensibilities and mores.
  - Consider this example of presentism, which refers to a husband and wife who resided in St. Louis in the 1880s: "In light of her husband's frequent bouts of drunkenness and the periodic beatings he gave her, it is surprising that Ann did not divorce him."

- Of course, in the 1880s, it's actually not surprising that the couple didn't divorce. Divorce laws varied from state to state, but generally, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a woman sued for divorce, the law favored the husband. Often, the husband kept every asset the wife had brought to the marriage and got custody of the children, while the wife walked away in shame. To write "it is surprising" that Ann did not divorce her husband betrays the viewpoint of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century family historian, not the historical context of St. Louis in the 1880s.
- Finally, be wary of anachronisms, that is, the introduction of a person or thing that is chronologically out of place. Imagine that an immigrant forefather of yours arrived in New York City in 1898, and you describe his experience coming through Ellis Island. The problem here is that the immigration facility on Ellis Island burned to the ground in 1897, and it took more than two years to rebuild it. During that time, steerage passengers arriving in New York were examined in the Barge Office at the foot of Manhattan. Describing an ancestor at Ellis Island in 1898 would be an anachronism.

### Suggested Reading

Colletta, "Hazards of Histories."

Judd, "Adding Muscle and Sinew."

Mills, ed., *Professional Genealogy*.

Schama, *Dead Certainties*.

Tey, *The Daughter of Time*.

Tuchman, *Practicing History*.

Wayne, *Death of an Overseer*.

### Assignment

At the end of Lecture 5, you selected an ancestral event, such as a birth, marriage, military service, or immigration experience, and built the historical



context surrounding it. Now, starting with that “fleshed-out” story, write the narrative of that event, taking care to follow the dos and don’ts explained in this lecture. Decide on a format for recounting the event: chronological order, *in medias res*, or statistical summary, followed by narrative. Choose the literary style you’re most comfortable with: reporting facts, recounting events in context, or re-creating historical scenes. Once you’ve made those decisions, start writing!

# Searching in Your Ancestors' Backyards

## Lecture 13

**H**ave you ever walked in the footsteps of an ancestor, gazed at a dilapidated old house that once sheltered generations of your family, or hiked the fields where a grandfather's tall cornstalks used to sway? No matter how much research you accomplish at a distance—in libraries, online, or in archives—your journey of self-discovery is not complete until you go where your ancestors lived. The sight of your ancestors' church, school, or business—even local landmarks that they, too, once passed by—quickens your pulse and fills your heart with the human dimension of the genealogical undertaking. In this lecture, then, we'll explore local resources you can find in your ancestors' backyards.

### Cemeteries

- Genealogists are notorious for haunting cemeteries because tombstones—from the 17<sup>th</sup>-century grave markers of New England to the granite monuments and marble plaques of modern times—are inscribed with vital information for identifying ancestors: first and last names and years of birth and death.
  - Usually, too, members of a family are interred side by side, and their tombstone inscriptions specify relationships, such as father, mother, husband, wife, and so on.
  - The tombstones of veterans sometimes indicate the war in which they served, their military branch, unit or ship, and dates of service. Grave markers of immigrants may give their country of birth.
- To learn what cemeteries served your ancestors' communities, which ones are still maintained, and where their records may be found, check local histories—such as the county and city histories we've talked about—and the Internet sites for genealogy mentioned in previous lectures. Local library or historical society staff members will also be happy to direct you to cemeteries in their communities.



**Apart from tombstone inscriptions, many cemeteries have written records, indicating who purchased the lots and listing burials.**

- In addition, many compilations of tombstone inscriptions have been published in books and online. One Internet site that is expanding rapidly is called FindaGrave.com. As of early 2014, this site contained 112 million photographs of tombstones; you may search this massive collection by your ancestor's name.
- Keep in mind that your rural ancestors may have been laid to rest in a corner of the family farm. Finding small private cemeteries in pastures and fields is part of the exciting fieldwork of genealogy. If you're trying to find an ancestor's grave under these conditions, take a trowel, sheers, and colored chalk. Old tombstones are often so worn by weather that the only way you can read them is to trace the letters with chalk.
- Be prepared mentally, too. Visiting the grave of an ancestor is a moving experience. That stone marker may be the only physical vestige of your forebear's sojourn on earth—other than you, of

course! You'll never get any closer to an ancestor than when you're standing at his or her gravesite.

### Records of Churches and Synagogues

- The records of religious institutions are indispensable for tracing lineage prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As you may remember, outside of colonial New England, civil authorities didn't start registering births, marriages, and deaths until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century or even the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, depending on the state. For periods before civil vital records became available, religious records are essential to reconstructing family groups and linking generations.
- Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Christian parishes have maintained sacramental registers for recording the baptisms, marriages, and burials of parishioners. These registers are replete with genealogical information, though precisely what facts you'll find in any particular record will vary depending on the religious denomination, the parish, and the time period. Kept by many clerics over many years, church registers vary broadly in appearance and legibility.
  - Baptismal records always contain the name of the person who was baptized and the date of baptism. Often, they also include the baptized person's date of birth, names of parents (including the mother's maiden name), names of godparents, and place of residence. Baptismal records may imply more than they state. For instance, naming godparents outside the family may mean that the parents were the only members of their families to emigrate to America.
  - Marriage records always name the bride and groom and the date of their marriage. In addition, marriage records may give the bride's maiden name, the names of both sets of parents, and the names of witnesses to the ceremony. Witnesses were usually relatives; thus, you should always look for their names in censuses to see how they might fit into your family tree.
  - Burial records also vary a great deal in both appearance and content. You may find only the name of the decedent and the

date of burial, or additional data may be provided, such as the date and cause of death, age of the decedent, name of surviving spouse, and place of interment. Widows and widowers are usually identified as such, and the name of the deceased spouse is noted. When the decedent is a child, the parents are named.

- For some denominations, the minutes of the church vestry, rather than sacramental registers, contain the most information about parishioners. If your ancestors were members of the Society of Friends, the most valuable religious record for your research will be the minutes of the meetings.
- Many church records have been microfilmed, and others have been transcribed and published in books; such records are readily accessible in libraries. However, a majority of old church registers survive only in the original, and these remain in the custody of the creating institution, sometimes gathered into a centralized archives. You can search for such archives using your computer browser.
  - For instance, the website of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati provides instructions for obtaining copies of sacramental records from all the parishes in the archdiocese. The site of the Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also offers what it calls “genealogy help.” Some religious archives have been given to university libraries or historical societies.
  - Simply browsing a denomination, such as Brethren in Christ, will likely bring up a site with information about its historical records. The site of the Brethren in Christ Church, for instance, indicates that its records are available in the Historical Library and Archives located at Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania.
- Jewish congregations also kept records of their activities and members. These might include minutes of the synagogue’s governing board; membership lists; records of births, marriages, and

deaths; and records of affiliated organizations, such as sisterhoods and brotherhoods.

- Jewish records may still be in the custody of the congregation that created them, or they may have been transferred to an archives for preservation. The American Jewish Archives, located at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, is probably the largest, but you can check online for others.
- In addition, there is a large corpus of published histories of American synagogues. These books contain information about thousands of Jews, all the way back to early colonial days. Two superb resources for Jewish genealogy are the *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy* and the site JewishGen.org. If you happen to be descended from a rabbinical family, you're bound to come up with a great deal of information!

### Libraries and Historical Societies

- The library or historical society that serves the community where your ancestors lived may be small and hold a modest collection, but this is where you'll find historical materials about local families that aren't available in much larger county, state, and national repositories.
- Usually, libraries and historical societies maintain a *vertical file*, that is, a file cabinet filled with newspaper clippings and other loose papers pertaining to families of the area. These files, which result from decades of random collecting, are arranged alphabetically by surname. Another resource you'll likely find is an index to the local newspaper, which will help you find birth, marriage, and death notices.
- Collections in the local library or historical society generally include books and periodicals about the area's businesses, schools, churches, government, fraternal organizations, cemeteries, and more. These modest institutions often have a few display cases containing an array of documents and artifacts of the community. You might be surprised to spot a high school diploma or class photograph that belonged to an ancestor of yours.

- Keep in mind, too, that one of the best resources you'll find in your ancestor's backyard is the local librarian or historian. These staff members may be genealogists themselves and may know local lore that never found its way into print.

## **City Directories**

- Starting with Boston and Philadelphia at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, local printers have published annual directories of their cities. Early directories list the city's male wage earners with their occupations and addresses. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, they include the names of female residents, as well. A single woman who was employed or a widow had her own entry. The wife of an employed male was named in parentheses beside her husband's name.
- For genealogists, city directories hold much more than just lists of names. They contain information about the city's schools, churches, synagogues, and cemeteries. They name the mayor and members of the city council, the police chief, and volunteer firefighters. And every directory is full of advertisements that depict the city's numerous businesses and name their owners and managers.
- City directories often contain maps, too, which come in handy when you want to see the plan of a city in a particular year. If you know your ancestor's street address, you may be able to find his or her church or synagogue.

## **Summing Up Community Records**

- Records of historical value generated in the city or town hall of your ancestors' community have probably been transferred to the state archives or the local library or historical society. Nevertheless, while you're walking in your ancestors' footsteps, it might be worthwhile to stop in the town hall or city hall to view old records that may still be onsite.
- Many of the local resources described in this lecture—cemetery records and tombstone inscriptions, records of churches and synagogues, materials in local libraries and historical societies,

and city directories—have been transcribed in the publications of genealogical societies. As we discussed earlier, you can consult PERSI, the Periodical Source Index to genealogical publications, and search online for articles by location or surname.

- Finally, you may want to consider joining a genealogical society that is active in the area where your ancestors lived. Through the society's newsletters or journals, you can learn about local history and resources. Articles detailing the experiences of other family historians in the target area may offer valuable information, advice, and hints for success. And membership in a society may allow you to meet and network with others who are "working on your lines."

### Suggested Reading

Carmack, *Your Guide to Cemetery Research*.

Dougherty, "Church Records."

Sack and Mokotoff, *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy*.

### Assignment

Using your Internet browser, key in the names of villages, towns, or cities where your ancestors lived and see what libraries and historical and genealogical societies serve those localities. Reach out to one of these organizations via e-mail, letter, or phone and make a local connection. Learn about cemeteries where you may find your ancestors' graves, and find out how to obtain copies of church or synagogue records relating to your ancestors.



# Assembling an Account of Your Discoveries

## Lecture 14

Every family history should be both an accurate record and a readable story. You want the work to reflect the reality of the past, but you also want people to enjoy reading it. What you write doesn't have to be elaborate, scholarly, or even comprehensive. But producing something tangible will allow others to learn what you've learned, to feel the excitement of discovery that you've felt, and to experience the sense of self-knowledge that genealogy has brought you. In this lecture, we'll focus on four fundamental questions to address before you start writing: (1) What am I writing? (2) Why am I writing? (3) For whom am I writing it? (4) How will I present my information?

### What Am I Writing?

- As we noted in Lecture 3, there are two ways to record lineage: genealogy and family history. Genealogies document the descendants of an ancestral couple, while family histories chronicle the ancestors of an individual. A genealogy comes forward in time from the past; a family history goes back in time from the present. With the first question—What am I writing?—you're deciding whether you want to produce a genealogy or a family history. Whichever you select, you'll have to limit its scope.
  - For American genealogy, it's typical to begin with the immigrant ancestors. An excellent example of this type of work is Helen Brieske's book *Lars and Martha Larson: From Valdres Valley, Norway, to Vernon County, Wisconsin*. Brieske does an exemplary job of narrating the lives of her great-grandparents in Norway, their voyage to Wisconsin in 1878, and five generations of descendants.
  - However, you may compile the genealogy of any couple, not necessarily the first in America. One example here is *The Seligman Family: The First Six Generations*, published online by Scott Seligman. This genealogy begins with the earliest

recorded Seligman in the city of Bobruisk, Belarus, Avram Seligman (ca. 1740–1798), and traces Avram’s descendants in Europe, the United States, and Canada.

- If you’re writing a genealogy, you also have to consider how many generations of progeny you will record. In other words, what will be the cutoff year? Keep in mind that publishing information about living persons may entail ethical or legal issues. For her genealogy of Lars and Martha Larson, Helen Brieske invited her cousins to contribute a few lines about their families. Thus, the generational record is complete, but only information the living relatives wanted in print was included in the book.
- If you produce a family history rather than a genealogy, you’ll still have to decide its scope. A family history contains a biographical sketch of each pair of ancestors—parents, grandparents, and so on. Again, how many generations of descendants will you record for each couple?
  - You may cut your family history off after the great-grandchildren of your ancestors, or you may choose to trace only the descendants of the one child whose lineage comes down to one of your grandparents. Such decisions are arbitrary, but you must make them to define the scope of your project.
  - Instead of producing a genealogy or family history, you may also choose to focus on a select portion of your family tree, such as your paternal or maternal line of descent. One work of this kind is *A Steele Family History: Planters of Old England, New England, and the American West* by Edward Eugene Steele.
- Until recently, comprehensive genealogies and family histories published as thick books were the norm. Today, however, with increased use of the Internet for sharing information, partial genealogies and family histories are proliferating.

## Why Am I Writing?

- There are many reasons for writing family history. Perhaps you've found a book about your mother's family published in 1906 and you want to bring it up to date. Or you may simply want to learn as much as you can about as many ancestors as you can and spread the word. Only you can say why you're writing a family history, but to keep yourself organized and focused, it's essential to think about this question.
- Knowing why you're writing your family history often suggests an overall focus or theme for the work, just as we saw, in an earlier lecture, that an overarching idea or central conflict brings focus and cohesion to an individual biography. For example, the history of a family often illustrates some aspect of the history of the United States, such as westward expansion or the Reconstruction. Another theme might be the vicissitudes of a specific industry or trade in which your family was involved.
- In addition to suggesting a focus or theme for your family history, knowing your purpose will help you handle the sensitive issues that inevitably emerge during the writing process: what information to include or leave out, what data to highlight or downplay. It's possible to be truthful and historically accurate yet still remain sensitive to the feelings and privacy of relatives. Exercise discretion, and note that you needn't give every fact equal attention in your narrative.

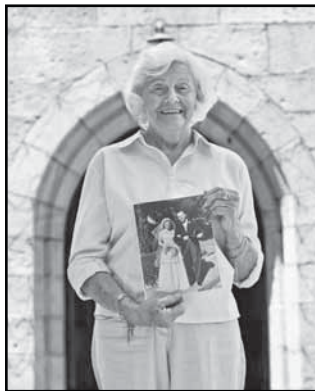
## For Whom Am I Writing?

- Asking yourself about the audience for your family history helps guide the tone and language of your narrative.
  - *Tone* refers to your attitude (as author) toward your subject matter. If you're writing for family members only, you may use the first person, and you might include your own reminiscences or express personal sentiments. If you want your work to be accessible to a broader readership, you should write in the third person and refrain from interjecting personal feelings.

- *Language* refers to the level of formality you use in your narrative. Again, if you're writing solely for relatives, you may use the casual English of everyday conversation. If you're writing for a general readership, you probably want to adhere to more formal standard English.
- One interesting genealogy was prepared specifically for a reunion of the Nordquist clan at Flathead Lake, Montana, in 1999. It commemorates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival in America of their Swedish progenitor. Written in easygoing English by a group of cousins who conducted the research together, the book has a warm, personal tone.
  - The text is addressed specifically to the fourth generation of Nordquist descendants in America, and the ancestral stories are interspersed with scrapbook-like pages showing photographs, newspaper clippings, documents, and mementoes.
  - Blank pedigree charts invite fourth-generation readers to enter the latest information about their own branches of the Nordquist tree.

### How Will I Present My Information?

- The possibilities for organizing the thousands of facts you've uncovered about your family are virtually limitless.
- One somewhat unconventional format is represented by the *Olschwanger Journal*, written by Anna Olschwanger. This is a series of publications, written in a journalistic style and put out once a year over the course of several years. In keeping with the idea of a journal, Olschwanger included not only her findings about



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**In deciding how to present your information, you might consider sharing accounts of interviews conducted with living relatives.**

ancestors but transcripts of interviews with living relatives, as well as photographs.

- Another way to compile ancestral information is represented by *The Family of Davide Palmieri and Girolama Paoloni: A History in Their Memory and an Effort to Maintain Family Ties*, written by Joseph Titti. This account encompasses both a genealogy and a family history, reaching both forward and backward in time.

## Essential Elements

- Regardless of how you answer the four basic questions, your multigenerational account should include these five essential elements: (1) pedigree charts, (2) a numbering system, (3) documentation, (4) illustrations, and (5) an index.
- Pedigree charts help your reader follow the story you're telling. They clarify the relationships among the numerous persons discussed in your narrative. Genealogy software generates descending charts for genealogies, ascending charts for family histories, and *hourglass charts* for combinations of the two. You may also devise your own chart for a branch of the family that's unusually complicated. If you publish electronically, you can make the names on the charts hypertext, so that clicking on a name links to a biography of that person.
- When you depict multiple generations on a pedigree chart, the relationship of one family member to another is clear, but when you narrate their stories, relationships can get muddled, and ancestors with the same or similar names can be confused. For this reason, genealogists have devised standard numbering systems to identify persons appearing in genealogical accounts.
  - According to these systems, a unique Arabic numeral is assigned to every blood-related individual in the family tree. These numbers appear only in narratives, in front of the name of the individual the first time he or she is mentioned and a second time at the beginning of that individual's biographical sketch.

- For genealogies, there are two numbering systems: the *register system* and the *modified register system*, also sometimes called the *NGSQ system* because it is used by the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*. For family histories, the numbering system is called the *Sosa-Stradonitz system* after the two genealogists who devised it.
- For a thorough explanation of these systems, consult *The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual*.
- As mentioned in Lecture 12, documentation imbues your work with credibility and professional stature. Footnotes or endnotes cite your sources, make cross-references to related works, explain or clarify information, and acknowledge the assistance of others. For standard documentation formats, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *Evidence Explained*.
- Illustrations are also essential elements of your family history. Nothing brings family stories more vividly to life than images from the period: photographs, documents, maps, heirlooms and other material culture, as well as sundry illustrations, such as prints and engravings. Today, thanks to computers and scanners, images of all kinds may be reproduced and inserted into narratives with minimal effort. Try to include an entertaining assortment of materials that will enhance your narrative, but be careful not to overdo it.
- Finally, every genealogical work should have an index to serve as an entrée into your work. The index should include not only all proper nouns—the names of people and places—but also topics that figure prominently in the work, such as “dairy farming,” “veterinary science,” “Freedman’s Bureau,” “cattle ranching,” and so forth.

### Suggested Reading

Curran, Crane, and Wray, *Numbering Your Genealogy*.

Hatcher, *Producing a Quality Family History*.

Hinds, *Crafting a Personal Family History*.

Hoff, *Genealogical Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Russell, *The Legal Genealogist*, <http://legalgenealogist.com/>.

University of Chicago Press, *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

## Assignment

Answer the four basic questions as they relate to your multigenerational account: (1) What am I writing—a genealogy, family history, or descent of a single line? Limit the scope of your work. (2) Why am I writing? Will your family story have a particular focus or theme? Knowing your purpose will help you decide what information to include or leave out, what data to highlight or downplay, and how to respond to the privacy concerns of living relatives. (3) For whom am I writing? Knowing your readership determines the tone of your text and its language. (4) How will I present my information? Are you planning to publish on paper or in an electronic format, as a single work or a series of smaller works? Once you've answered these four questions, create an outline of your multigenerational account that includes pedigree charts, a numbering system, documentation, illustrations, and an index.

# Extending Your Family Tree Overseas

## Lecture 15

Our ancestors came from many countries all over the world, and the issues you may encounter in accessing and using historical materials from overseas will vary tremendously, but the rewards are likely to be great. Our focus in this lecture will be Europe, but many of the methods we will cover are applicable to other countries on other continents, as well. No matter what your ancestral country is, there are several ways to conduct research in its records: using the Internet, using microfilm, through correspondence, in person, and by hiring an agent. Your success in using these methods depends first on learning three essential facts about each immigrant ancestor: full original name, approximate year of birth, and native town.

### Preparing for Research in Foreign Sources

- As we've seen in earlier lectures, many Americans do not have the exact same surname used by their immigrant ancestors. Surnames have been spelled variously over the centuries; they've been translated and transliterated; and some have even gone through transformations.
  - For example, one French Huguenot family named La Fontaine fled in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to Holland, where the name was changed to Van Tyne. Then, a generation later, when the family came to British North America, the name became Fontayne.
  - Until relatively recent times, some cultures did not use fixed surnames at all but patronymics. A *patronymic* is a second name derived from the father's given name, such as Itzak ben Reuven, for example, meaning Isaac son of Rubin. Jews, Swedes, Norwegians, and Finns all used patronymics for generations before adopting fixed surnames.
  - Some surnames resulted from cultural misunderstanding. The Chinese, for instance, put the surname before the given name—



the exact opposite of our custom in the West. Some Chinese immigrants wearied of correcting Americans and simply made their given names their surnames!

- And, of course, many surnames were changed completely to blend more easily into American society.
- Unfortunately, if your surname has changed, there's no simple or sure way to discover what the original was. You might try gathering every piece of paper you can find pertaining to your immigrant ancestor, as well as his or her siblings and children in America. Perhaps one of them will reveal what the original name was.



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**Old postcards and other mementoes from overseas may provide valuable clues about your foreign ancestors' original names, birthdates, and native towns.**

- Another essential fact you must know to pursue research in foreign records is your immigrant ancestor's approximate year of birth. In the past, many men and women had the same given name and surname, just as they do today. One way to distinguish your ancestor from other individuals with an identical name is by age.
- Because most records were kept on the town level, it's also important to know your ancestor's native town. Even if the records are gathered today in a national or regional repository, they are still accessed by town name. Again, many towns overseas have the same or similar names; many town names have changed over

the centuries; and some towns have been known by two or three different names in different languages.

- To find these three essential pieces of information—your immigrant ancestor’s original surname, year of birth, and native town—check the following sources:
  - Family lore and living relatives.
  - Keepsakes and heirlooms from the old country, such as passports, birth and baptismal certificates, diplomas, postcards received from relatives overseas, and so on.
  - Published works, such as genealogies, local histories, histories of ethnic communities, and national biographies.
  - Internet databases.
  - Your ancestor’s obituary in the newspaper or the obituaries of siblings.
  - Civil or religious marriage and death records of your immigrant ancestor.
  - Birth and marriage records of the immigrant’s children.
  - The inscription on your ancestor’s gravestone or the cemetery record of the burial.
  - Federal records, such as passenger lists, naturalizations, military records, homestead files, and U.S. passport applications.
  - Lineage society publications, such as those of the Daughters of the American Revolution, General Society of the War of 1812, and the National Huguenot Society.

## Enhancing Your Research

- To enhance your research in foreign sources, see if you can meet the following challenges: (1) Locate your ancestral town on a map, (2) learn something of your ancestor's language, (3) familiarize yourself with the records and archives of the target country, (4) practice reading the script, (5) write abroad for records, and (6) understand the cultural context. One tool you can use to help meet all these challenges is FamilySearch.org. On the homepage, click on Search, then Wiki; enter your country of interest; then click on a particular topic.
- Locating your ancestral town on a map can be tricky because national borders—and borders within countries—have shifted over the centuries.
  - You might begin by entering the town name into your Internet browser. Many overseas towns have helpful websites, but their information usually reflects current conditions, not those your ancestors knew. To see the town's situation in your ancestors' day, you'll need to use historical gazetteers and maps—either in print or online.
  - It's important to locate your ancestor's town on a map of the era because you'll need to access records from that era, and to do that, you must know what the political-administrative structure was at the time, not today. Further, you need to confirm that the modern-day town of that name is indeed the same as the historical town of the same name.
- If your ancestors didn't come from an English-speaking country, you'll need to read records in a foreign language. If you don't speak the language, try the following sources:
  - First, consult a genealogy guide for Americans tracing various national heritages, such as French, Italian, German, and so forth. These guides usually contain information about the language of the target country and a glossary of key words for genealogy.

- Of course, you can also consult foreign-language dictionaries, which will help you translate foreign records into English.
- You might also consider whether someone in your network might serve as a translator, such as a relative, a fellow member of your genealogical society, or even a language teacher at a nearby school. You may be able to find a volunteer translator at your local LDS Family History Center. You can also hire a professional translator, but always ask for references first.
- Finally, consider taking a course in your ancestral language. You can learn at your own pace using online instruction or courses on CDs.
- There are several ways to familiarize yourself with the records and archives of your ancestor's country.
  - Again, consult genealogy guides, which explain what historical records exist for the target country, describe the information they contain, and specify where they're archived today. These books also discuss pertinent related materials, such as name indexes, in print and online.
  - Information about foreign records may also be found on the Internet sites of ethnic genealogical societies.
  - In addition, many overseas archives are now digitizing their historical materials and uploading them to their websites.
  - For many decades, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been microfilming records from all over the world. The microfilm is in the Family History Library in Salt Lake City but may be borrowed and viewed at Latter-day Saints Family History Centers and partnering libraries worldwide. Further, all of the Family History Library microfilm is being digitized and uploaded to FamilySearch.org.

- A good way to practice reading unfamiliar and archaic scripts is to view sample documents in printed genealogy guides and online. You can also try accessing records from your ancestral towns on microfilm or online; you may be amazed at how much you can decipher. The records tend to be formulaic, and once you learn the standard phrases, you can pick out the particulars, such as names, dates, and occupations. For scripts that defy decoding, you may decide to hire a professional genealogist with the required linguistic expertise.
- If you plan to visit your ancestor's native country and use the repositories there, or if you want to obtain records by mail, you'll need to correspond with government officials, archivists, librarians, and clerics. For this purpose, genealogy guides and online sites pertaining to your target country often provide form letters in the foreign language. You simply fill in the blanks with the names and dates of your ancestors and mail the letters overseas. Today, the Internet sites of overseas towns, archives, and libraries also provide e-mail addresses; some may allow you to send a record request and payment electronically.
- Aside from the foreign language and archaic script, records from other countries pose cultural challenges. To comprehend the content of these records, you'll need some familiarity with that land and its history, which you can gain by reading about the countries of your ancestors. If you can read the language, local histories published in the target country are rich in family information. But if you're limited to English, you'll still find many scholarly sources available.

## **A Journey of Self-Discovery**

- Genealogy is a journey of self-discovery. It's enthralling to learn who your ancestors were, what their lives were like, and perhaps something of what they were like. As we've seen throughout this course, genealogy is entertaining, educational, inspirational—and rather addictive.

- The unanticipated gift of genealogy is that you learn more about yourself, too. Reconstructing your family tree gives you your own personal historical perspective on world history and on life. You will come to see yourself in a whole new way.
- Genealogy never ends either. Every discovery brings a new mystery to be solved and keeps you constantly searching.

### Suggested Reading

Carmack, *Discovering Your Immigrant and Ethnic Ancestors*.

Daniels, *Coming to America*.

Family Search, <https://familysearch.org>, especially “Tracing Immigrant Origins,” [https://FamilySearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Tracing\\_Immigrant\\_Origins](https://FamilySearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Tracing_Immigrant_Origins).

Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607–1860*.

Kraut, *The Huddled Masses*.

Novotny, *Strangers at the Door*.

Wittke, *We Who Built America*.

### Assignment

When you know the full original name, approximate year of birth, and native country of an immigrant ancestor, prepare to conduct research in foreign records. Using the Internet and microfilmed records and through correspondence, in person, or through an agent, meet the six challenges presented in this lecture: (1) Locate your ancestral town on a map, (2) learn something of your ancestor’s native language, (3) familiarize yourself with the records and archives of the target country, (4) practice reading the script, (5) write abroad for records, and (6) understand the cultural context. Don’t be overwhelmed! These are skills that you acquire gradually, often over the course of years of research. Millions of Americans are succeeding in deciphering the scribbled evidence of their forebears’ lives ... and are greatly enjoying the process. You, too, will be enthralled as you experience firsthand the Old World heritage that is your own personal inheritance.

## Online Genealogical Resources

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**Note:** Many of the subscription websites listed below are available to patrons for free at public libraries.

Access Genealogy. [www.accessgenealogy.com](http://www.accessgenealogy.com). Free site; large directory of online genealogy resources. Includes numerous searchable databases and extensive information for those researching Native American genealogy.

Ancestry.com. [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). Subscription site, offering millions of digitized worldwide records and user-uploaded family trees.

Castle Garden. [www.castlegarden.org](http://www.castlegarden.org). Provides passenger arrival information for the port of New York from 1820–1892; extensive but not comprehensive.

Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>. Site maintained by the Library of Congress; provides state-by-state information about newspapers published since 1690. Also contains several million digitized pages from selected newspapers.

Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System. [www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm](http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm). Access to the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, a database maintained by the National Park Service.

Cyndi's List. [www.cyndislist.com](http://www.cyndislist.com). Free clearinghouse for genealogical content on the Internet; search by subject to link to thousands of websites.

Ellis Island. [www.ellisland.org](http://www.ellisland.org). Features digitized ship lists of passengers arriving in New York City from 1892–1924. Also includes links and tips for conducting genealogical research.

Family Search. <https://familysearch.org/>. Free site; includes the catalog of the Family History Library (<https://familysearch.org/locations/saltlakecity->

library), the largest genealogical library in the world, operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The site offers information about records of countries around the world and access to digitized records. Users can build and upload their own family trees and share photos and stories about their ancestors. Also provides links to maps on other sites, including maps of foreign countries, and serves as an important tool for finding ancestors overseas.

Find a Grave. [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com). Free site; millions of cemetery monuments photographed and transcribed.

Find My Past. [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com). Commercial site; includes a variety of census, directory, and other historical records.

Fold 3. [www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com). Subscription site; provides name indexes to federal records, predominantly military records from the Revolutionary War into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Genealogy Bank. [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com). Subscription site; has a large collection of digitized historical sources, such as newspapers.

General Land Office. [www.glorerecords.blm.gov](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov). Allows access to state-by-state databases of federally transferred land records in the 33 public domain states.

Heritage Quest. [www.heritagequest.com](http://www.heritagequest.com). Subscription site; one of the largest genealogy sites for digitized records, books, and other publications. Provides access to PERSI, the largest subject index to genealogical periodical literature.

Immigrant Ancestors Project. <http://immigrants.byu.edu>. Free site of the Immigrant Ancestors Project at Brigham Young University. Includes data about millions of individuals taken from emigration registers of several countries.

Immigrant Ships Transcribers Guild. <http://immigrantships.net>. Transcripts of more than 14,000 ship manifests.

Jewish Gen. [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org). A superb resource for Jewish genealogy.



Library of Congress. [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov). Features extensive online collections of maps; images; colonial- and federal-period original sources, including legislative records and newspapers; and much more.

National Archives and Records Administration. <http://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/>. Information about the federal records in the U.S. National Archives and some digitized sources. Also has downloadable forms to help organize your search, a tutorial for starting genealogical research, and tips for preserving family records.

National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators. [www.nagara.org](http://www.nagara.org). Provides links to state, county, and municipal archives.

National Genealogical Society. [www.ngsgenealogy.org](http://www.ngsgenealogy.org). Free site (with a members-only section) of the National Genealogical Society, the largest genealogical organization in the United States. Provides information about institutes, conferences, publications, and historical resources.

New England Historical and Genealogical Society. [www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org). Free site (with a members-only section). Preeminent collection of materials for genealogists; predominantly—but not exclusively—contains materials related to colonial-period New England.

Paper of Record. [www.paperofrecord.com](http://www.paperofrecord.com). Commercial site, specializing in historical newspapers.

ProQuest. [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com). Subscription site with a huge collection of digitized sources, including historical newspapers.

Social Security Death Index. <http://deathindexes.com/ssdi.html>. Free database of more than 89 million people who have died since 1936. Provides instructions for obtaining a copy of the original Social Security application form.

SteveMorse.org. [www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org). Free site; provides alternative search engines for genealogical content across the Internet.

TheShipsList. [www.theshipslist.com](http://www.theshipslist.com). Features ship passenger lists, along with ship pictures and descriptions, information on the construction and ownership of ships, and itineraries.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. [www.uscitizenship.info](http://www.uscitizenship.info). Provides information for finding naturalization records made since September 1906.

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. <http://va.gov/>. Provides information on procedures for examining pension records dating from World War I and later.

U.S. GenWeb Project. [www.usgenweb.org](http://www.usgenweb.org). Provides links to state genealogical websites and to online maps of varying years.

U.S. Geological Survey. [www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov). Contemporary and historical topographical maps.

World Vital Records. [www.worldvitalrecords.com](http://www.worldvitalrecords.com). Links to millions of birth, marriage, and death records worldwide.

In addition to the sites listed above, the websites of the state archives where ancestors lived are essential resources for all genealogical research. They contain information about the state's historical sources and millions of digitized records. Find the URLs for all 50 state archives at the website of the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators ([www.nagara.org](http://www.nagara.org)).

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